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Who Builds Assyria:
Nurture and Control in Sennacherib's Great Relief at Khinnis

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Who Builds Assyria:
Nurture and Control in Sennacherib's Great Relief at Khinnis

by

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"…how are we here, when the vessel in which we rode plunged down so long a tunnel?" He shrugged my question aside. "Why should gravity serve Urth when it can serve Typhon?"

–Gene Wolfe, *The Book of the New Sun*

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Abstract

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Located in an isolated gorge in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Neo-Assyrian rock reliefs at Khinnis are unusual for their size, shape, and subject matter. The most striking of these is the enormous Great Relief, the largest single Assyrian sculpture in existence, which depicts a pair of gods attended by the duplicated figure of the Assyrian king. Both the Great Relief and the other sculptures of the Khinnis site were carved on the orders of Sennacherib (r. 705-688 BCE), to commemorate the canal head he constructed there. The Great Relief itself was positioned over the exact juncture wherein the waters of the river Gomel were canalized and sent on their way towards Nineveh, designated by Sennacherib as Assyria's new imperial capital, irrigating fields and orchards along the way.

In this thesis I examine the composition and iconography of the Great Relief, both in the context of Sennacherib's irrigation programs and the inscription carved at the Khinnis site. This inscription contains a curiously bifurcated account of both

Sennacherib's civil works in Assyria and his brutal sack of Babylon in 689. In both cases, Sennacherib emphasizes his ingenious technical ability to manipulate water for the benefit of the Assyrian state, either through the creative irrigation of the Assyrian heartland and the new capital, or the destructive flooding and leveling of Babylon. I argue that the dichotomy presented by these activities, a dualism of "nurture and control" through technical expertise, is a persistent theme throughout the rhetoric of Sennacherib's inscriptions and reliefs. Through a close analysis of the Khinnis inscription, the Assyrian tradition of landscape sculpture, and the emblematic and narrative strategies employed in palatial relief programs, I argue that the Great Relief at Khinnis is an emblematic image of the dualistic ideology of Sennacherib's reign. Ultimately, the Great Relief stands as a carefully devised visual statement about the nature of state power, consciously created by Sennacherib to signal his conceptual re-founding of the Assyrian empire.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

In a classic exchange from the 1974 film *Chinatown*, Depression-era private investigator Jake Gittes confronts the sinister tycoon Noah Cross with knowledge of his plans to siphon public water from Los Angeles and redirect it to a nearby valley of orange groves owned by the mogul, making Cross incredibly wealthy in the process. "You see, Mr. Gittes," Cross replies, "either you bring the water to LA, or you bring LA to the water." When the incredulous detective demands to know why Cross needs more money, how much better he could eat or what there is to buy he can't already afford, Cross interjects, "The future, Mr. Gittes! The future!"[1] In this single conversation, Noah Cross expresses a fundamental truth: civilization, both in its agricultural and urban aspects, is unthinkable without water. This being so, the control of water is power, a power that not only forces settled life in the present to conform to its movement, but also dictates the patterns of urban development in the future.

It is a power that can be destructive as well as creative in its manifestation, both in gushing force and deathly absence. Thorkild Jacobsen has observed that the characteristics of a civilization are signally determined by its environment, and that for the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia the unpredictable and violent power of water within the landscape was a central influence in their conception of the cosmos:

> The Tigris and the Euphrates…may rise unpredictably and fitfully, breaking man's dikes and submerging his crops. There are scorching winds which smother man in dust, threaten to suffocate him; there are torrential rains which turn all firm ground into a sea of mud and rob man of his freedom of movement…Here, in Mesopotamia, Nature stays not her hand; in her full might she cuts across and

[1] *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski (1974; Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 1999), DVD.

> overrides man's will, makes him feel to the full how slightly he matters…Man is not tempted to overrate himself when he contemplates powers in nature such as the thunderstorm and the yearly flood.[2]

Almost all of the disasters within Jacobsen's catalogue of environmental woes are related in one form or another to water, in its presence or scarcity. It is hardly surprising therefore that the control of water became a preeminent concern amongst the earliest Mesopotamian polities, and that "planned large-scale irrigation by means of canals" would become the hallmark of Mesopotamian agriculture and civilization.[3]

Throughout the history of the ancient Near East, Babylonia and southern Mesopotamia were long considered the quintessential "canal-land," a region especially identified with this form of agricultural management. Yet at the beginning of the 7th century BCE, the ascendant Assyrian empire undertook a vast irrigation program under the monarch Sennacherib (705-681 BCE) that was to rival in scope the canal systems of its southern neighbor. Drawing from the mountains north and east of Assyria these aqueducts brought fresh water into the Assyrian heartland, irrigating crops and orchards.[4] Their construction was in fact part of a larger program of renovation and urban renewal organized by Sennacherib, who moved the Assyrian capital to the city of Nineveh and used the waters of the canal system to create vast gardens and artificial marshes in and around the city.[5]

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[2] Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, ed. by Henri Frankfort and H.A. Frankfort (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 126-7.
[3] Jacobsen, 128.
[4] This area roughly corresponds to modern Iraqi Kurdistan, near the foothills of the Zagros.
[5] See Julian Reade, "Studies in Neo-Assyrian Geography Part I: Sennacherib and the Waters of Nineveh," *Revue d'assyriologie* 72 (1978): 47-72, 157-180, and Ariel Bagg, "Irrigation in Northern Mesopotamia:

While Sennacherib was involved in building his new capital and creating the infrastructure to support it, he was simultaneously quelling a series of increasingly difficult and violent rebellions to the south, in Babylonia. The people of Babylon chafed under Assyrian imperial control, and Sennacherib attempted to settle this restive region through a number of different and ultimately unsuccessful strategies. Capturing the city in 689 after a long siege and evidently exasperated by the intractability of the problem, he ordered the city be leveled to the ground and its debris dumped into the canals. With this brutal act he attempted to end forever Babylon's aspirations to independent rule, and to signify that Assyria (which had long looked to Babylon as the preeminent source of its culture) was now the single great power in the Mesopotamia. This dualism, inherent in the construction of one metropolis and the destruction of another, lies at the heart of Sennacherib's reign. The rhetoric of his inscriptions and relief programs presents him as the builder of a "new Assyria," yet also emphasize his abilities as a leader in warfare and the grim fate which awaited those who challenged Assyrian authority.

Writing on the construction of the Pharaoh's image in ancient Egypt, John A. Wilson wrote that "the Egyptians' love of symmetrical balance produced an ideal ruler who was nicely composed of graciousness and terror, because rule is nurture and rule is control."[6] It is this same dichotomy between nurture and control, two fundamental faces of political authority, which defines the creation and destruction of cities during Sennacherib's rule. Indeed, it was not long after the sack of Babylon that Sennacherib

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Irrigation for the Assyrian Capitals (12th-7th centuries BC)," *Irrigation and Drainage Systems* 14 (2000): 301-324, for their excellent examinations of these projects.

[6] John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, 71.

completed the largest and final branch of his great canal system, the climax of his efforts to engineer the Assyrian landscape through the power of water. The head of this canal was located approximately 50 km from Nineveh, at an isolated gorge near the village of Khinnis (ancient Hanusa) where the waters of the river Gomel were canalized and directed to flow towards the capital. Here, in addition to a number of smaller images of the king carved at the top of the cliff side, Sennacherib ordered a massive relief carved into the rock above the juncture where the river flowed into the canal, and marked this fork with a sculpted weir block. The relief on the cliff face, the Great Relief, is the largest Assyrian relief in existence, and the weir block or Gate Relief is an object without parallel in Assyrian art. These singular sculptures are accompanied by an inscription, which details both the creation of Sennacherib's aqueduct system and the sack of Babylon.

The Great Relief, the accompanying inscription, and to a lesser extent the Gate Relief form the focus of this thesis. The site of Khinnis was an important space, a "landscape of power," which hosted both an account of Sennacherib's works and an emblematic representation of the ideology of his reign. Both images –textual and visual– are rhetorical, in the sense that they construct a specific image of Sennacherib's kingship and attempt to inculcate the viewer with the emphases contained therein. I argue that in examining the function of the site, the contents of the inscription, and the iconography of the Great Relief, we can interpret Khinnis as an ideological message Sennacherib created to communicate his aspirations for a "re-founded" Assyrian empire. Sennacherib's reign is especially important in this regard, as it marks the consolidation of the final phase of

Assyria's imperial expansion, which under his successors would extend as far as Egypt and Iran into the largest empire the world had yet known.[7]

The chapters that follow each deal with the aspects of Khinnis enumerated above. Chapter 1 examines the function of the site, the placement of the reliefs in the landscape, and describes their content. Chapter 2 consists of a close reading of the Khinnis inscription (the full text of which is provided in an appendix to this thesis), and uses the inscription's contents as segue for examining the historical context of the Great Relief and the technical and ideological aspects of landscape engineering, water management, and canal-building in Assyria. Of especial interest is Sennacherib's portrayal of himself as an ingenious technological expert, able to bend water to the needs of the state, and the use of this self-presentation as a legitimating device. Chapter 3 discusses the representational context of the Great Relief, examining Assyrian traditions of landscape sculpture and emblematic imagery in order to generate an understanding of the composition of the Great Relief and how it functions. This chapter also analyzes the relief program of Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh, and discusses the rhetorical and ideological themes held in common by the palace program and the Great Relief. Finally, chapter 4 focuses on the iconography the Great Relief, and draws together the arguments presented to create an interpretation of this unusual sculpture.

[7] J. N. Postgate divides Assyrian history into four phases: creation and expansion of the Old Assyrian state from 1400 to 1200 BCE, a "long recession" from 1200 to 900 BCE, the reestablishment of its former dimensions from 900 to 745 BCE, and a final stage of expansion beginning under Sennacherib's father Sargon II in 745 and lasting until the empire's collapse in 605 BCE. See J.N. Postgate, "The Land of Assur and the Yoke of Assur," *World Archaeology* 23 (1992): 247.

By and large, most scholars have examined the Great Relief in wider works on divine imagery, or as evidence for the geographical extent of Sennacherib's canal system, meaning that many of the cultural and ideological messages contained within the Great Relief have been obscured or treated cursorily. While scholars such as Irene Winter and Tallay Ornan accept that the Khinnis reliefs make a statement about the empire's abundance under Sennacherib, they do not investigate the many nuances contained within the iconography of the Great Relief, nor integrate their reading of this image with the contents of the inscription.[8] This thesis seeks to examine the Great Relief as a part of both artistic and engineering programs, and within the wider context of Sennacherib's policies while king.

Two strands continuously reappear throughout this analysis. One is the ability of Sennacherib and his government to shape the natural force of water to the will of the state, a power of potent cosmological and even divine dimensions, which I argue confirmed and certified Assyria's new imperial aspirations. The second is the dual facets of power mentioned above, nurture and control, manifest in both the structure of the Khinnis inscription, the composition of the Great Relief, and the dualistic use of water power which Sennacherib claimed for himself. Ultimately, I argue that the relief worked to confirm and certify the hydrological function of the site, through the presence of a heraldic emblem of Sennacherib's kingship. The composition of the relief, and the rhetoric of natural control within the inscription, can also give insight into a fundamental

[8] See Irene J. Winter, "Ornament and the 'Rhetoric of Abundance' in Assyria," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East 1: Of the First Millenium BCE* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 163-183, and Talley Ornan, "The Godlike Semblance of a King: The Case of Sennacherib's Rock Reliefs," in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context: Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter*, ed. Marian Feldman and Jack Cheng (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 161-177.

truth of rulership across all periods. As Noah Cross implied, control of water is control of civilization, and the king's use of such power is dependent upon his ability to channel this force for both creative and destructive ends.

Chapter 1: The Site of Khinnis

In this chapter, I analyze the formal characteristics of the Great Relief at Khinnis and the site it inhabits. After a brief historiographical summary I describe the composition of the relief, its placement in the landscape, and the accompanying reliefs and sculptures that cluster within the area. I then proceed to an iconographical reading of the imagery and figures contained therein. Relying on the work of earlier explorers who visited the site in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, I also summarize how previous scholars have interpreted the nature and function of the site, ultimately as a canal-head within a larger program of water engineering undertaken by the Assyrian state. It should be mentioned at the outset that many older works refer to the site as "Bavian," the name of a town at the mouth of the gorge within which the reliefs are located. As the village of Khinnis is actually closer to the reliefs, more recent works have used that name for the site itself, and I will use the term "Khinnis" to denote the site as a whole and distinguish it from the gorge.

The Bavian Gorge is located along a bend of the Gomel River in modern-day Iraqi Kurdistan, approximately 60 km north and east of Mosul (fig. 1). The Great Relief was carved at a point where the sheer rock face of the cliffs surrounding the river widen to create a flat area, some 700 m north of the village of Khinnis and 30 m from the riverbed (fig. 2). The Great Relief is set within a wider landscape of sculpture: to the southwest along the cliff face is a badly-damaged image which appears to contain a horse and rider, while further upstream lies a large sculptured block, now tilted into the river but which must have originally stood upright and roughly parallel to the foot of the cliff.

Above these sculptures eleven panels have been carved at intervals into the cliff face, all holding an image of the Assyrian king gesturing towards symbols. Three of these contain inscriptions, placed at intervals in the cliff face most directly above the larger sculptural features.

Austen Henry Layard writes that the first Westerner to visit the site was M. Rouet, the French consul at Mosul.[9] In 1848 Layard himself examined the reliefs and recorded detailed descriptions of the Great Relief, the nearby relief of a man on horseback, and the royal images.[10] In order to interpret the inscriptions Layard rappelled down the cliff face to record them, and was able to translate their subject as a combined account both of Sennacherib's aqueduct construction and his expedition against Babylonia.[11] Layard also recorded a description of the sculptured block in the Gomel, and excavated a series of basins which appeared to be connected to a fountainhead embellished with carved lions.[12]

In 1914, the German scholar W. Bachmann accompanied the well-known expedition to Assur undertaken by the German Oriental Society. While in Iraq, Bachmann traveled north to the Bavian Gorge to examine the reliefs, carrying drawings and notes taken on the inscriptions by the Englishman L. W. King.[13] Bachmann's observations of Khinnis, published after the First World War, were the most thoughtful and detailed until that time, and his monograph provides a wealth of data and speculation.

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[9] Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Babylon and Nineveh* (London: John Murray, 1853), 207.
[10] Layard, 208-211.
[11] Layard, 212-213.
[12] Layard, 214-215.
[13] Published in W. Bachmann, *Felsreliefs in Assyrian: Bawian, Maltai und Gundük* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1927), i-vi.

In March 1934 Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd, scholars from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, explored the site of Khinnis as part of a larger investigation into the canal systems built by the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib, and developed an interpretation of the function of the site substantially different from Bachmann's.

More recent scholarship has tended to drift away from examining the site as an ensemble. Julian Reade's 1978 article "Studies in Assyrian Geography Part I: Sennacherib and the Waters of Nineveh" builds on the work of Jacobsen and Lloyd, using the Khinnis inscriptions for the documentary evidence they give concerning Sennacherib's canal systems, and contextualizes the site within the wider program of that king's public works projects. Indeed, the site has primarily been of interest to assyriologists for the content of the inscriptions, though the imagery of the reliefs has also received art historical treatment. Irene Winter has written on iconographic elements of the Great Relief in considering the role of vegetal ornament in Assyrian art, and Tallay Ornan has used the Khinnis reliefs to analyze the nature of joint royal-divine representation in Sennacherib's Assyria. Florian Kreppner has also examined the Khinnis reliefs in the context of a meditation on the notion of "public space" in nature.[14] Although these treatments have made excellent use of the wealth of information at Khinnis, none have examined the Great Relief in itself or the manner in which the textual and visual features of the site act in concert. Bachmann's detailed description of Khinnis forms the basis of what follows.

[14] See Florian Janoshka Kreppner, "Public Space in Nature: the Case of Sennacherib's Rock Reliefs," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 29 (2002): 367-383.

The Great Relief is square, measured by Bachmann at 9.30 m in height and 9.20 m in length, and contained within a frame 30 cm deep (fig. 3).[15] It is in poor condition, due both to the gritty quality of the limestone cliff and a series of small spaces carved behind the reliefs with apertures cut directly into the image. Bachmann believes these to be the cells of early Christian monks dating to late antiquity, though Layard thought they may have been be tombs.[16] The recessed cavities off these small chambers appear closer in form to *arcosolia* than cells, serving as spaces for the entombment of the dead, though much further research would be necessary to corroborate this interpretation.[17]

The relief is composed of four figures, arranged in a linear format (fig. 4). The two outermost are so similar that they seem to be mirrored or duplicated. Both carry a mace or scepter in their left hand and clench a small oblong object in their right fist up to their bearded face. They wear the tall, spiked, fez-like headgear of the Assyrian kings, sport dangling earrings, and wear a cord around the waist of their robe. This reaches the ankles of their sandaled feet, one of which steps forward so that both may be seen. The complicated garments which these royal personages wear appear to be layered, the first a series of curved folds running from over the right shoulder under the belt and in curves down the left leg and ending in a tasseled fringe. Bachmann sees a second, more typical robe with straight hem underneath, and identifies the fringed outer garment as a very conservative form of dress reserved exclusively for cultic activities.[18]

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[15] Bachmann, 7.
[16] Bachmann, 5; Layard, 209.
[17] Nassos Papalexandrou, personal conversation, February 2012.
[18] Bachmann, 8, 9.

The two inner figures are raised above the ground plane of the relief as they stand atop animals, and both wear the cylindrical horned crown of divinity. The figure on the left is a bearded male, standing on both a lion and a fantastic dragon-like beast Bachmann refers to as a "snake-griffin" (*Schlangengreif*).[19] He holds the Mesopotamian divine accoutrements known as the "rod and ring" in his left hand and a curved, elongated object in his right. This Bachmann identifies as a double-curved club ending in small lion heads, the uppermost of which has a protruding tongue.[20] The ring held in the left hand has a small figure in it, a repetition of the duplicated kings on either side of the middle pair, but facing towards the deity. His garments consist of a tasseled robe and mantle, earrings longer than those of the flanking kings, and also bracelets of rosettes on his wrists. The face of the figure is badly damaged, as is the curious club he holds.

The figure on the right is female and somewhat shorter than the male divinity. She stands atop a single lion, and likewise carries the rod and ring in her left hand, complete with miniature king facing towards her. Her rod, however, is topped by a palmette-like flower or tree that fans out above her fist (fig. 5), and her empty right hand is raised towards the male divinity. She wears a garment similar to that of the male deity, and also wears bracelets and a necklace composed of rosettes.[21] Taken together, Bachmann notes that the royal figures are roughly three times life size, while the divine figures would be somewhat larger were they to stand on the same level as the kings.[22] He also observes

[19] Bachmann, 9.
[20] Bachmann, 9.
[21] Bachmann, 10.
[22] Bachmann, 8.

that the exaggeratedly high crowns of both the kings and deities in the image may have been carved thus in order to correct the perspectival foreshortening of the crowns were one to see the relief standing below.[23]

This could be an important observation, as it would indicate that the Great Relief was designed with viewers in mind, specifically those who would have stood looking up to it from the river. The huge size of the Great Relief would have also allowed for clear viewing across the river, and Bachmann includes photographs that indicate the Great Relief would have remained relatively legible from a distance of some 50 or 60 m on the opposing riverbank (fig. 6). The Great Relief is somewhat tilted in order to follow the face of the rock, and is thus also visible from the south as well (fig. 7). The emphasis of placement seems to have been in following the river below, and the imagery appears to be projected primarily towards the river and the sculpted block (fig. 8). While large, the size of the Great Relief also seems to limit appropriate viewing distances to the opposite bank and somewhat beyond, further indicating that the Great Relief should be considered in conjunction with the site of Khinnis and the function it served.

Above the frame of the Great Relief are weathered remains of sitting lions sculpted into the natural rock (fig. 9). According to Bachmann, there would have been three pairs (each about .9 m tall) arranged symmetrically with three meters in between each pair; today, only the features of the central pair remain intact enough to identify them as lions. Those on either side have been reduced to the paws of the animals. These pairs seem to have held stone "stumps" (*Felsstumpf*) between them, and Bachmann

[23] Bachmann, 8.

believes they may have once supported statues of standing deities. Alternatively, they may have supported pillars of some kind.[24]

As mentioned above, the Great Relief is accompanied by a number of other interesting sculptural features within the Bavian Gorge. Approximately 40 m from the Great Relief, another relief was carved into the cliff face, looking out upon a dry plain on the right bank of the Gomel. Set back on a short ledge, this image is so badly damaged that it can barely be made out, but both Bachmann and Layard were able to discern the outlines of a figure on a galloping horse, prompting Bachmann to call it the "Rider Relief" (fig. 10).[25] Layard was also able to recognize two figures on either side of the horseman, which he thought were figures of a deity and king, though he gives no reason for this identification.[26] Bachmann interpreted them as king figures, which seems more likely as this would echo the duplicated king composition from the Great Relief and neither appears to be mounted on an animal familiar.[27] Layard also observed a long spear held by the rider, which by Bachmann's day had been eroded or effaced away so as to be unrecognizable.[28] In the upper left corner of this image are the remains of a small image of a procession of deities standing on animal mounts, but according to Bachmann's photographs and diagrams the relief seems to be too damaged to see how they might relate to the larger figures. Bachmann is skeptical that relief is a part of the wider ensemble at Khinnis; he notes that the only comparable imagery is from the reliefs of

[24] Bachmann, 10-11.
[25] Bachmann, 16.
[26] Layard, 210.
[27] Bachmann, 17.
[28] Layard, 210.

Aššurbanipal's palace at Nineveh, and comments that the relief seems "un-Assyrian."[29] He seems to imply that the relief was originally Assyrian, but it may have been re-carved at a later date and then defaced and destroyed due to its easily-accessed location.[30]

Forty meters northeast of the Great Relief lies the large sculptured block half-submerged in the Gomel River. Bachmann, who called this block the Gate Relief, measured it to be 8m tall, 6 m long and 4 m wide. The imagery of this unusual object is complicated, but it can be delineated into three rough zones (fig. 11). On the long side, two winged human-headed bull colossi identical in appearance to those known from the entrances of Neo-Assyrian palaces, wearing the horned crown of divinity, look out at opposite ends. Between them stands a bearded figure, clutching a lion to his chest and holding the curved club in his right hand. He wears a knee-length tunic and a long draped overgarment, and while his torso is turned toward the viewer his leg stance points rightward towards the end face of the block. Above this composition is a register recalling the Great Relief, only in this case the mounted figures of the god and goddess (presumably, as the block is broken here) flank a single king facing the male deity on the left. As on the Great Relief, the king here poses with his right hand raised towards his mouth, perhaps with the same oblong object contained in his fist. The badly worn end of the block was composed of three frontal standing figures: the god flanked by the duplicated king, flanked in turn by the faces of the human-headed bulls. Here the god

[29] Bachmann, 17, 20.

[30] Bachmann, 21. Due to the damaged state of this relief, the uncertainty regarding its iconography, and my personal inability to visit the site during the writing of this thesis, I have omitted discussion of this image in the following chapters, and declined to take a stand on whether it is can be fully attributed to the original Khinnis ensemble.

again holds the rod and ring in his left hand and the curved club in his right, while the flanking kings hold scepters or maces in their left hands and bring their right up to the face. All of these elements sit atop a three-stepped base.[31] This sculptured block appears to have initially been stood upright at a slight angle to the cliff base opposite, though still roughly parallel, with the narrow end side facing up the gorge.

Roughly 20 m north of this block are a pair of basins (*Wasserbecken*), of which the higher drains into the lower by means of a tube carved into the rock. The spout through which water would have flowed was originally sculpted as the face of a lion, embellished with smaller lions-rampant on either side. Layard only observed the rampant lions on either side of the "fountain" mouth when he excavated this feature of the site; Bachmann was able to recognize the faint traces of the original appearance of the lion face.[32] It should be noted that there are also basins to the west of the Rider Relief, nestled into the rock cliff where it widens into a small plain south of the Great Relief.

Scattered in the cliff face above these sculptures are the eleven smaller king reliefs (fig. 12). These are all 1.8 m in size, and identical save for the groups of symbols that each king gestures towards. Each niche is rounded on top; the king, turned to the viewer's right, points his raised right hand to the symbols while his left holds a mace or scepter (fig, 13). He wears the same form of robe and tall crown as the kings on the Great Relief. Three of these niches (numbers 4, 7 and 11 in the scheme created by L.W. King on his visit to the site) contain a repeated inscription, which Layard says were "written

[31] Bachmann, 14.
[32] Layard, 215; Bachmann, 13.

across" the king figures (fig. 14).[33] The inscriptions are difficult to access, and like Layard and King before him Bachmann rappelled down the rock face in order to make squeezes of the inscriptions. These all proclaim the Assyrian king Sennacherib as their author, and Bachmann concludes that it must be this monarch who is responsible for the site as a whole, with the possible exception of the Rider Relief.[34]

It is therefore Sennacherib who flanks the gods on the Great Relief, who stands between them on the sides of the sculptured block, and who is carved in the niches above on the cliff face; all of these images exhibit elements of a unified style that Bachmann attributes to this Assyrian monarch, especially the tapering "cone-like" figure of the king.[35] The height of the king's crown could also indicate that he is one of Assyria's later rulers: Pauline Albenda has noted that between the palace reliefs of Aššurnasirpal II and Aššurbanipal (a span of over two hundred years) the king's headgear doubles in height, an observation which would seem to belie Bachmann's contention that the tallness of the crown was used to correct perspective for those viewing the relief from below.[36]

Bachmann identifies the god on the Great Relief as Aššur, the embodiment of the Assyrian state and the chief deity of its pantheon, and the goddess as Ishtar of Nineveh, a counterpart of Ninlil and Aššur's consort.[37] A number of iconographical details confirm

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[33] Layard, 211.
[34] Bachmann, 22; Layard, 212.
[35] Bachmann, 7.
[36] Pauline Albenda, "Expressions of Kingship in Assyrian Art," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 2 (1969), 51; compare for example the height of the crowns worn by these kings in Samuel M. Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria 883-859 B.C.* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1976), 106, and in Eva Strommenger, *The Art of Mesopotamia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), fig. 251.
[37] Bachmann, 12.

Bachmann's reading. Aššur was something of a composite deity, who absorbed the attributes of other gods as the Assyrian empire expanded. He assimilated the horned cap of divinity as a symbol from the god Anu, and the snake-dragon or *mušhuššu* (Bachmann's *Schlangengrief*) from the Babylonian god Marduk, both of which appear in the reliefs.[38] The goddess seems to have attributes not only of Ishtar (such as the lion and the rosettes) but also Ninlil, called Mullissu in Assyria, the consort of Aššur.[39] Irene Winter considers this figure a composite of these goddesses.[40] The "rod and ring" which both gods hold is a very old attribute of divinity, thought to signify divine power and perhaps to have been derived from tools used to measure boundaries.[41] Although other rock reliefs carved by Sennacherib, such as those at the site of Maltaï, portray gods holding rod and ring while goddess hold the ring only, here both Aššur and Mullissu carry this pair of instruments.[42]

Turning to the sculptured block in the riverbed, it should be noted that the composition on the lower side-register repeats that of the entrance façade reliefs of Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh.[43] These were in poor condition when Layard initially excavated them, but a full impression can be gained from the reconstructed throne-room façade of the palace of Sennacherib's father, Sargon II, at Khorsabad (fig. 15). Both façades contain the central lion-clutching figure with curved

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[38] Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 38.
[39] Black and Green, 109, 140.
[40] Winter, "Rhetoric of Abundance," 171.
[41] E. Douglas van Buren, "The Rod and Ring," *Archiv Orientální* 17 (1949): 449-450; see also Black and Green, 156.
[42] Van Buren, 445.
[43] A similarity observed by Ornan, "Semblance," 167.

club, standing between human-headed bull colossi. The stance of the central figure appears turned towards the entrance in both cases, though it is impossible to know if the bull colossi of Sennacherib's palace faced outwards toward the viewer entering the palace courtyard as Sargon's did; the colossi at Khinnis face in the direction of their bodies. Unlike Sargon and his predecessors, the bull colossi of Sennacherib's palace omit the "extra leg", and the use of four rather than five legs at Khinnis further confirms the connection of site to Sennacherib.[44]

The figure standing in the center, clutching the lion to his breast, faces the viewer yet arranges his legs to stride to the left, and if the other side of the relief were visible it seems likely that his counterpart would stride to the right, towards the sculpted side of the block. This rough-and-ready personage Bachmann identifies as an archaic "Gilgamesh" figure, familiar from both Sennacherib's palace façade reliefs and those of Sargon II as well.[45] The iconographic details of the upper register recall the Great Relief, though in a somewhat inverted arrangement, and the end of the block features a frontal Aššur flanked by the duplicated Sennacherib.

The site of Khinnis was clearly of significance, prompting a huge investment of manpower and resources in its creation. Bachmann observed that the Great Relief alone would have been a very costly undertaking, and is the largest Assyrian relief sculpture known in existence.[46] Yet the purpose of this site was interpreted in various ways after its initial discovery and documentation. Layard wrote that it seemed to be "a sacred spot,

[44] Bachmann, 15.
[45] Bachmann, 14.
[46] Bachmann, 12.

devoted to religious ceremonies and to national sacrifices."[47] Bachmann's interpretation of the site's function revolves around several archaeological features near the reliefs. A small plateau south of the reliefs seems to have been the site of a substantial structure in ancient times, and Assyrian pottery shards were discovered there. Bachmann also delineated a huge rock cutting he believed to be the foundation for large retaining walls, with the possible aim of supporting a terrace with space for more structures.[48] Farther up the gorge, Bachmann noted the presence of a large number of holes or shafts cut into the rock bed of the river gorge directly under the Great Relief, roughly 50-100 cm in depth, and connected by small channels. He calls these holes "planting pits" (*Pflanzgruben*), and compares them with similar pits cut into garden grounds at the site of Assur, the religious center of the Assyrian empire. [49]

Bachmann thus reads the gorge as an enormous *Gartental*, a landscaped, garden-like valley filled with imported plants and trees (fig. 16). Based on the use of the planting pits at Assur, Bachmann postulates that the relief site was filled with cultivated flora, and raises the possibility that the nearby ruins on the plateau may have been some kind of royal lodge for the Assyrian kings. Access to the *Gartental* and flowing water from the lion basins could have made Khinnis a cool and refreshing spot for a summer retreat.[50] Furthermore, Bachmann notes the presence of a natural spring east of the Great Relief in a small cavern, which must have enhanced the gushing, paradisiacal nature of the site.[51]

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[47] Layard, 215.
[48] Bachmann, 2-3.
[49] Bachmann, 5.
[50] Bachmann, 2.
[51] Bachmann, 4.

He suggests that the sculptured block might possibly have been part of a gate entering into the *Gartental* given its compositional evocation of the palace façades, hence his term "Gate Relief" for this object.[52] In any case, the evidence suggests that the Great Relief and the other features of the Khinnis site would have existed in some kind of built environment, with the perspective of viewers standing below the reliefs taken into consideration, though changes to the landscape from Assyrian times to the present prevent a perfect understanding of how exactly such sightlines would have worked. A carved-out area to the north of the reliefs seems to have served as a quarry as well.

As mentioned above, the inscriptions that accompany these reliefs are in a difficult to reach position on the cliff side, yet the three versions are so similar that in combination the entirety of the inscription can be restored.[53] Layard described its contents as follows: an introduction beginning with an invocation to Aššur and the great gods of Assyria, and a list of the names and titles of Sennacherib, proceeding through a detailed description of Sennacherib's canal diggings directed towards the watering of Nineveh, followed by a description of his siege and sack of Babylon in 689 BCE.[54] In 1924, a complete translation of the Khinnis Inscription by Daniel D. Luckenbill appeared in a volume collating the extant sources for Sennacherib's reign into the *Annals of Sennacherib*. The inscription enumerates thirteen towns from which Sennacherib ordered the construction of canals to feed into the Khosr River, which ran "from the border of the

[52] Bachmann, 16.
[53] Layard, 211.
[54] Layard, 212-13.

town of Kisiri to the midst of Nineveh," an apparently canalized river which the king renamed Sennacherib's Channel.[55]

This canal was fed in turn by a channel running "through the midst of Mt. Tas," which evidently took up the runoff from the mountainous region and directed it into Sennacherib's Channel. Also included is a description of the ceremonies that attended the opening of the canal and the rewards given to the engineers and workmen.[56] The details of Sennacherib's canal system will be taken up in the next chapter, but of interest here is Sennacherib's statement that he "fashioned six great stelas with the images of the great gods, my lords, upon them, and my royal image, with face averted (in prayer) I set up before them" at the mouth of the canal dug from Mt. Tas.[57]

In March 1934, University of Chicago scholars Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd explored the site of Khinnis as part of a larger investigation into Sennacherib's canal systems. Having followed the line of a massive canal northwards from Jerwan, where they had initially discovered blocks bearing inscriptions attributing the construction to Sennacherib, they progressively traced it to the Bavian Gorge.[58] Jacobsen and Lloyd identified the site of Khinnis and the reliefs contained therein as the "mouth" of the canal.[59] It was here that the Gomel was canalized into an aqueduct by Sennacherib's engineering works, drawing the water south into the wider irrigation

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[55] Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 79; see also the newer translation of sections of this inscription included in Thorkild Jacobsen and Seton Lloyd, *Sennacherib's Aqueduct at Jerwan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 36.
[56] Luckenbill, 81-82.
[57] Luckenbill, 84; Jacobsen and Lloyd's translation reads "and my royal image in the attitude of salutation," Jacobsen and Lloyd, 38.
[58] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 19.
[59] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 41.

system.[60] In exploring the site, Jacobsen and Lloyd found under Bachmann's Gate Relief a wall of thick masonry that had arrested its total collapse into the river. A few meters away, another masonry wall was discovered that would have run 6 meters from the base of the cliff directly under the Great Relief, where the rock had been artificially cut away to run exactly parallel to the first. This channel was traced to the rock cutting which Bachmann (who was unaware of the presence of any aqueducts at Khinnis) had initially thought was the chase of a huge retaining wall, leading Jacobsen and Lloyd to interpret these features as the remains of the parapets and bed of the canal that began at Khinnis (fig. 17).[61]

This understanding of the site, in turn, lead to a reconsideration of Bachmann's interpretation of the Gate Relief. If it was here that the Gomel was directed to flow into the canal, then the Gate Relief would have been placed at the beginning of the parapet, with the end relief facing the oncoming river and the weir which directed the overflow, and the side reliefs looking over the now bifurcated river and canal (fig. 18). Although no longer a part of a literal gate as Bachmann had hypothesized, "Gate Relief" remains an appropriate term for the weir block, as it stood at the spot where canal and river were differentiated, the very gate of the aqueduct leading into the Assyrian heartland. Indeed, the stance of the Gilgamesh figure points to the end which would have stood at this fork, just as in the palace façades he points towards the entrances. Jacobsen and Lloyd also write that the holes Bachmann had thought to be planting pits may have been used for

[60] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 42.
[61] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 46.

wooden stanchions to ease the movement of stone blocks from the quarry above.[62] Interestingly, the stone used in the construction of canal parapets excavated further south at the site of Jerwan matched that of the quarry at Khinnis, which must have provided the majority of the stone used in the canal's construction.[63]

The Great Relief would therefore have looked over the newly-filled channel just after the point where the river ran into it, monumentally marking the mouth of the canal. The Rider Relief, in fact, may have been placed in a similar matter. Jacobsen and Lloyd mention the presence of a dry streambed, which according to their layout ran from the western basins to the canal and river.[64] The spot where this stream would have met the proposed course of the canal would lie directly under the Rider Relief. It seems therefore that Khinnis serves in some way as the conceptual source of Sennacherib's Channel, the Great Relief and its attendant sculptures marking the place where the river was diverted into the artificial canal schemes of the Assyrian king. The presence of the quarry adds to the font-like character of the site, a built environment serving as a source of water and stone.

The king's image is repeated at least sixteen times throughout the site, with the likely addition of a seventeenth repetition on the now buried side of the Gate Relief and possibly two more flanking whatever central image the Rider Relief may have originally held. His omnipresence at the site certainly confirms his position as the creator of the canal and the irrigation systems it watered, and would have allowed his image to

[62] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 49.
[63] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 46.
[64] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 47.

"oversee" the canal head as long as it functioned. As for the Great Relief, its focus seems to have been primarily directed towards the water flowing below, and possibly to viewers on the other side of the canal. Indeed, from the opposite side of the river, a viewer would have had a full view of the site's operation, as water flowed in, was diverted at the Gate Relief into the aqueduct, flowed directly under the Great Relief, past the Rider Relief, and then out the gorge towards Jerwan. The king niches would also have been especially visible from this position, scattered along the top of the cliff face, and perhaps even at such a distance the three inscribed niches would have appeared somewhat blurred and still marked as "written over." These stood over the entrance, functional center, and exit of the ensemble, marking these important junctures of the site's operation with Sennacherib's inscriptions.

As a whole, the various reliefs were oriented towards the hydrological function for which the Khinnis site was constructed. The following chapters explore the content of the inscription and the iconography of the Great Relief in detail, and attempt to integrate them into an understanding of this function.

Chapter 2: The Khinnis Inscription

In an article examining the Sumerian monument known as the "Stele of the Vultures," fashioned to commemorate the victory of Eannatum, ruler of Lagash, over the neighboring city-state of Umma, Irene Winter calls the accompanying inscription an "'autonomous narrative' method."[65] Whereas the visual imagery depicts the immediate dimensions of Eannatum's victory and the "iconic" image of his god on the reverse and obverse of the stele, the text describes the legal grievances leading to the conflict and the oaths taken by the enemy ruler subsequent to his defeat. The reliefs "detail the immediate action(s), while the text emphasizes the longer-range antecedents and consequences," extending forward and backward in time.[66]

In other words, while text and image do not correspond precisely to one another, they operate in tandem, presenting facets of the same event that a viewer can assemble into a complete whole. That the text is inscribed directly into the imagery, filling the spaces between the figures and engulfing them in words, reinforces the notion that the text serves to provide the background of the events visually depicted. The visual and verbal are not two means of saying the same thing, nor are they completely unrelated. Rather, they are intertwined forms of representation that create the composite whole, informing and complementing one another. They are indispensable for one another, and for the compound message of the monument.

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[65] Irene Winter, "After the Battle is Over: The Stele of the Vultures and the Beginning of Historical Narrative in the Art of the Ancient Near East," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East Vol. II: From the Third Millenium BCE* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 24.
[66] Winter, "After the Battle," 23.

This intertwined usage of text and image is not unique to the Sumerians, but rather a characteristic feature of ancient Near Eastern art. "The separation of text and image into two categories," writes Zainab Bahrani, "is alien to the Near East. The script was seen as an integral part of the image in Near Eastern art."[67] Inscriptions in Mesopotamian art are written on stelae, on the body of sculptures, and across relief imagery, and medium and message are "inseparable, like the print and pictures in a book."[68] Seal impressions are even more intertwined, combining text and image into a single line of identification for their bearer. In all these cases, as with the Stele of the Vultures, the text operates as another part of the overall representation, pointing to the "indissociable relationship between [text and image] that is distinctive of Assyro-Babylonian beliefs."[69] The Khinnis inscription firmly falls within this tradition as it was carved directly across three of the royal figures which dot the cliff side, a practice with earlier precedents in Assyrian relief.[70]

It is therefore essential to examine the inscriptions that accompany the Khinnis reliefs before fully engaging with their imagery, and to consider text and image as integral parts of a coherent, unified message Sennacherib embedded in his configuration of the physical and conceptual landscape at Khinnis. In this chapter I examine the location of the inscription at Khinnis (often referred to as the Bavian Inscription, using the older name for the site), the rhetoric and vocabulary of the content, and use the text to

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[67] Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 169.
[68] Julian Reade, "Ideology and Propaganda in Assyrian Art," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 329.
[69] Bahrani, 99.
[70] See below, n. 72.

reconstruct the historical and ideological context of Sennacherib's reign. Finally, I discuss the common themes and concerns that appear in the inscription, and how the text can be used to inform an investigation of the Great Relief.

As mentioned above, there are eleven king reliefs carved into arched niches in the cliff face above the Khinnis site, at intervals along the course of the gorge. Each contains the figure of the king turned towards the viewer's left, gesturing towards divine symbols in the upper right corner. Three of these also contain inscriptions, and a look at L.W. King's diagram of the site shows the inscriptions spaced along the section of the gorge directly over the reliefs: one on the right end of the cliff (looking from the east) where the Gomel enters the gorge (marked 11), a second above and slightly to the right of the Gate Relief's position (marked 7), and a third where the cliff slopes downwards on the left, just south of the Rider Relief (marked 4). Layard wrote that these were injured, "but being very nearly, word for word, the same, they can to some extent be restored." Layard remarks that the inscriptions are written across these niches, over the king figures, a point which Bachmann does not specifically address but does illustrate in a photograph (fig. 19).[71] This compositional arrangement is perhaps best suggested by the reliefs in the palace of Aššurnasirpal II, wherein the "Standard Inscription" is likewise inscribed as a band of text running over the figures of kings and genii.[72]

From King's diagram, it seems that only the southernmost of the inscriptions is accessible by foot, and hence probably the most badly-damaged of the three,

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[71] Layard, 211.

[72] See Samuel M. Paley, *King of the World: Ashur-nasir-pal II of Assyria 883-859 B.C.* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1976), 121, pl. 11.

necessitating the acrobatic feats that became virtually *de rigueur* for Western scholars visiting the site. King argues that Sennacherib must have carved the inscriptions into these inaccessible positions in order to preserve them from defacement.[73] From the vantage point of the canal below they would have been impossible to read, and given the widespread illiteracy of Neo-Assyrian society the simple presence of the inscriptions would probably have had more of an impact on viewers than their actual content.[74] Even for those who could read, the increasing adoption of Aramaic as the lingua franca of the Near East during the period may have rendered the text difficult or illegible. What may be more significant is placement: the inscribed niches are carved over the entrance, middle, and exit of the Khinnis ensemble. The image of the king inscribed with his utterance thus looms over the most important junctures of the site. These niches serve to introduce, sustain and punctuate the landscape at Khinnis, directly over the places where water entered, was canalized, and exited in an almost antiphonal succession.

As mentioned the appendix attached to the end of this work contains the full text of the Khinnis inscription, but a brief overview may be helpful. Lines 1-4 begin with an invocation listing deities, headed by Aššur, and proceed through Sennacherib's name and titulary. Lines 5 and 6 describe Sennacherib's refoundation of Nineveh, and the need for irrigating the city's agricultural lands. Lines 7-16 give a list of towns and a mountain from near which Sennacherib directed water into the Khosr River, which flowed to Nineveh. Lines 17-23 describe the resulting abundance of Nineveh, while 24-26 contain

[73] L.W. King and H.R. Hall, *Egypt and Western Asia in the Light of Recent Discoveries* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1907), 414.
[74] Julian Reade, "Neo-Assyrian Monuments in their Historical Context," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, ed. Mario Fales (Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente, 1980), 150.

an oath on Aššur that it was Sennacherib who undertook these activities exactly as related. The next lines, 27-34, describe the sacrificial ceremonies attending the opening of the canal. The military section of the inscription begins with lines 35-43, which recount the battle of Ḫalule and the subsequent invasion of Elam. Lines 44-54 describe the siege and sack of Babylon by Sennacherib's troops, and finally lines 55-60 recount the actual creation of the Khinnis reliefs and the curses which would fall upon those who would seek to divert the water from Sennacherib's canals and Nineveh. The discussion that follows hews closely to this structure, examining both the rhetoric of Sennacherib's inscription and the historical context of his reign as they appear in the text.

The Titulary

The first section of the Khinnis inscription contains an invocation to the gods, followed by a series of Sennacherib's epithets. It runs as follows, as translated by Luckenbill and including his line numbers:

> 1. Aššur, Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Marduk, Nabû, Nusku, Ishtar, Sibi, the great gods, 2. who in all the lands give attention (lit. raise the eye) to the rule of the black-headed race of men, (who) named me ruler: 3. Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world), the prince who endows (their cults): in their enduring grace, 4. from the upper sea to the lower sea, I have marched in safety, and the princes of the four quarters (of the world) I have brought in submission to my feet, 5. so that they drew my yoke.[75]

In an important article on Sennacherib's titulary, Mario Liverani analyzes how the king's epithets changed over the course of his reign. These variations are "always the result of a decision deeply considered and not at all casual," consciously reflecting the

[75] Luckenbill, 78-9: 1-5.

changing circumstances of the king's rule.[76] For example, inscriptions recounting Sennacherib's earliest campaigns call him "king of Assyria, unrivalled king," while those composed after his eighth campaign refer to him as "king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters." Liverani calls the first a "competitive" or "heroic" stage, while the second corresponds to a "territorial" stage appropriate after Sennacherib had in fact marched his armies across the Near East.[77] Sargon II (722-705 BCE), Sennacherib's predecessor, used this second collection of titles as well, implying that Sennacherib only felt comfortable assuming it after he had truly earned it.[78] Likewise, in texts focused on the king's building and agricultural activities, there is a change from "pious shepherd, fearful of the great gods" in certain contexts to "expert shepherd, favourite of the great gods", and Liverani suggests the king needed to earn these titles as well.[79]

The Khinnis inscription uses the three-part formula, which Liverani interprets as both centralized and cosmological. The first element ("king of the universe") refers to a "generalized, compact totality," the second ("king of Assyria") the core, and the third ("king of the four quarters") a "patterned totality." Liverani observes, "It is after the intervention of the Assyrian core, necessary reference point, that the chaotic totality is changed into a cosmic totality."[80] These totalities are meaningless without reference to the imperial center of Assyria and the territory it occupies, and a similar dynamic may be

[76] Mario Liverani, "Critique of Variants and the Titulary of Sennacherib," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, 231.
[77] Liverani, "Critique," 234-5.
[78] Liverani, "Critique," 236.
[79] Liverani, "Critique," 244.
[80] Liverani, "Critique," 235.

at work within the Khinnis site. The king's image sits at the very center of the site, both within the Great Relief and on the sculpted weir block, which together form the fulcrum of the site's hydrological function. The king niches at the extremities of Khinnis are essentially meaningless without reference to this operative center, where the ruler's image embellishes the hardware that gives the site its purpose.

Liverani also distinguishes between "competitive-submissive" phraseologies and those that emphasize "stable and peaceful control."[81] An excellent example of the former is the inscription between the legs of the Door "a" bull colossus from Court VI of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, translated by John Russell:

> Sennacherib…wise, expert, heroic warrior, foremost among all rulers, the bridle that curbs the disobedient, the one who strikes the enemy with lightning. Assur, the great god, gave me a kingship without rival; against all those who sit on daises he made my weapons strong; from the upper sea of the setting sun to the lower sea of the rising sun, he made all the rulers in the world bow down at my feet.

Russell observes that the emphasis is here on how Sennacherib subdues all foreign enemies with the support of Aššur, and that "by virtue of military control, is the greatest among them."[82] The king's role is to compel obedience and subdue enemies to the Assyrian state.

The Khinnis inscription, in contrast, is set in a "pietistic-pastoral" register, beginning with an invocation of the gods and Sennacherib's role as "the prince who

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[81] Liverani, "Critique," 240.

[82] John Malcolm Russell, "Bulls for the Palace and Order in the Empire: The Sculptural Program at Sennacherib's Court VI at Nineveh," *The Art Bulletin* 69 (1994): 533. Another translation of this passage can be found in Luckenbill, 66: 1-3.

endows their cults".[83] Here the phraseology used in militaristic inscriptions is employed to "put in great relief the role of divinities," as well as to stress the prosperous nature of Sennacherib's territorial dominion.[84] This is accomplished by an interesting inversion of military phrases. In line 2 "black-headed men," or peasants, are here treated not as subjects to be conquered (as Sennacherib says elsewhere that Aššur "submitted [them] to my feet"), but as "objects of peaceful government" to be shepherded.[85] The expansive geographic phraseology of line 4 also echoes the bull text above.[86] Yet here again the phrasing is altered to fit the context of Khinnis: whereas the bull text tells us that all the rulers of the known world between the "upper sea and the lower sea" are conquered subjects, the Khinnis text uses the same phrase to relate that Sennacherib could peacefully traverse the world without fear of attack, and that these subdued lords now follow him like domesticated animals on a tether.

Far from being mere boilerplate, the Khinnis titulary is a conscious creation, and can be fruitfully compared with other inscriptions in the "pietistic-pastoral" mode. The bull text of Door "c", also an entrance into Court VI at Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, falls into this category. In contrast to the military presentation of the Door "a" bull text, the king's role as wise ruler is emphasized:

> Sennacherib…wise stag, prudent ruler, shepherd of mankind, leader of widespread peoples, am I. Bēlet-ilī, lady of living creatures, duly looked upon me in the womb of the mother who bore me and created my features. Ea gave me wide knowledge equal to that of the sage Adapa, and granted me broad

[83] Liverani, "Critique," 239, 246.
[84] Liverani, "Critique," 242.
[85] Liverani, "Critique," 240, 243.
[86] Liverani, "Critique," 243; Luckenbill translates "I have marched in safety" and the princes "drew my yoke," Luckenbill, 78-79: 4-5.

> understanding. Assur, father of the gods, made all mankind bow down at my feet; he elevated me to be shepherd over the land and people. He gave me a just scepter that enlarges the land, and put into my hands an unsparing sword for the overthrow of the enemy.[87]

Here, the aggressive terminology is replaced by universal and protective epithets, emphasizing Sennacherib's ability to govern mankind.[88] Territorial rule is still the subject, yet the sword of conquest is here tempered by the "just scepter" that enlarges and propagates.

Like the pietistic elements of the Khinnis text, the Door "c" text also emphasizes Sennacherib's direct and special connection with the gods. He is not merely a pious king– he is in fact "named ruler" at Khinnis, while the bull text tells us he was already selected for kingship by the gods while in the womb. The distinction between the inscriptions seems to lie in the fact that it is the gods who are foregrounded in the Khinnis text, while the king is foregrounded in the text from his own palace: at Khinnis he is appointed king by the gods, while in the bull text he is "called by the gods and miraculously perfected for his office in the womb of his mother…the perfect king".[89]

The pastoral element of the Khinnis titulary also has parallels. Another inscription in this register comes from Assur, on a stele commemorating Sennacherib's completion of the *bīt akīti*, or "Temple of the New Year's Festival". Beginning with the tripartite division described above the inscription characterizes the king as one:

> …who made the image of the god Aššur and of the great gods, who accomplishes the [forgotten] rites of Esharra…who is fearful of the gods of heaven and is well

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87 Russell, "Bulls", 533-534.

88 Russell, "Bulls", 534.

89 Simo Parpola, quoted in Mehmet-Ali Ataç, *The Mythology of Kingship in Neo-Assyrian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169.

> acquainted with the gods of Assyria; who exalts the great gods in their abodes, who enlarges their competences; who makes Assyria, who brings to completion their cities; who causes to obey the land of the enemies, destroyer of their cities, deporter; who causes canals to be dug, who opens pits, who causes ditches to murmur; who establishes fruitfulness and abundance in the wide fields of Assyria; who puts irrigation water inside of Assyria…[90]

Russell notes that this building account focuses on two types of public works: structures and cities, and irrigation works. He writes, "Both of these types of construction facilitate, and are symptomatic of, internal prosperity; that is, they indicate a type of expansion that results from good government of the people."[91] In comparison, however, it seems that the gods again take precedence at Khinnis. Their approval is predicated on the correct and prosperous shepherding of the "black-headed" peoples, which Sennacherib has so abundantly earned through the creation of the aqueduct.

Although the Khinnis inscription's titulary is clearly related to other building records, it is also curiously ambivalent. The phrases concerning the "black-headed people" and Sennacherib's ability to march from sea to sea both relate to peaceful, nurturing territorial control, yet in a manner that still seems to echo the more aggressive epithets used in annalistic accounts. Russell writes that the differing tones of the Doors "a" and "c" bull text titularies in Court VI are directly determined by the following narratives. As we shall see, the Khinnis inscription is no exception.

Nineveh and its Irrigation Works

"The most obvious single feature in the settlement pattern of the Late Assyrian kingdom," writes David Oates, "is the great metropolis." For the first time in the history

[90] Liverani, "Critique," 248-249. Russell remarks that the inscription refers to the destruction of Babylon, and therefore must date after 689 BCE.
[91] Russell, "Bulls", 535.

of Mesopotamia, the cities of the north rivaled in size those of the southern plains during the Neo-Assyrian period.[92] As the empire grew, several rulers founded new capitals, ever more determined to create imperial cities worthy of their territorial dominion. The first of these was Kalhu, (Tell Nimrud) founded by Assurnasirpal II (884-859 BCE) and capital of the empire until Sennacherib's father Sargon II began constructing the city of Dur Šarrukin (Khorsabad). In the aftermath of Sargon's violent death in battle his project was abandoned,[93] and Sennacherib instead chose Nineveh, an ancient cult city of the goddess Ishtar.[94] Construction began immediately following his accession in 701 BCE, and was to continue throughout his reign; from an initial size of 150 ha, Sennacherib expanded the city until it covered a massive 750 ha by the time it was besieged and captured in 612 by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes.[95] Indeed, in folk tradition Nineveh was remembered being so large that it required a three days walk to travel across it.[96]

The next section of the Khinnis inscription details the condition in which Sennacherib found the city of Nineveh when he began his reign, here translated by Jacobsen and Lloyd using Luckenbill's line numbers:

> 5. At that time I greatly enlarged the site (lit. abode) of Nineveh, Its walls and the outer wall thereof, which had not 6. existed before, I built anew and raised

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[92] David Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 42.

[93] Hayim Tadmor suggests that because Sargon's body was never recovered his personage became taboo: his name is never mentioned in inscriptions, and the site of his death in Cilicia was never visited by Sennacherib. See Tadmor, "History and Ideology in the Royal Assyrian Inscriptions," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, 26.

[94] See Julian Reade, "The Ishtar Temple at Nineveh," *Iraq* 67 (2005): 347-390.

[95] T.J. Wilkinson, Jason Ur et al., "Landscape and Settlement in the Neo-Assyrian Empire," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 340 (2005), 26.

[96] Hayim Tadmor, "World Domination: The Expanding Horizons of the Assyrian Empire," in *Landscapes: Territories, Frontiers and Horizons in the Ancient Near East*, ed. L. Milano et al. (Padua: Sargon, 1999), 61.

> mountain high. Its fields, which through lack of water had fallen into neglect (lit. ruin) and 7. its commons, which for want of water had become a wilderness and were covered with spiders' webs, while its people, ignorant of artificial irrigation, turned their eyes heavenward for showers of rain– 8. (these fields) I watered…[97]

The emphasis on the king's novel actions, "which had not existed before", imparts to Sennacherib the role of a founder-hero, and gives him what Liverani calls "heroic precedence."[98] It was a commonly used motif in the inscriptions of Sennacherib's predecessors,[99] and recurs throughout Sennacherib's corpus of texts; Russell observes it is even implicit in the name of his palace in Nineveh, the "Palace Without Rival."[100] Of interest is the *kind* of actions Sennacherib claims precedence for. The focus is squarely on agriculture, and the king's ability to create productive land through watering what was once fallow. This sentiment has earlier precedents in royal Assyrian rhetoric as well, such as Sargon II's declaration that he ordered the settlement of "desolate steppe" and the cultivation of "barren land that had not known the plow".[101]

To provide this water for the new capital and its hinterland, Sennacherib undertook "the most ambitious hydraulic engineering project in the history of Assyria: 150 km of canals and channeled water courses, tunnels, aqueducts, dams and reservoirs."[102] Lines 8-16 detail the geographic dimensions of Sennacherib's canal construction, and the names of towns from which he drew water for his irrigation

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[97] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 36; for the first phrase of line 8, see their n. 27.
[98] Mario Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, ed. Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 309.
[99] A.K. Grayson, "Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: Literary Characteristics," in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons*, 44.
[100] Russell, "Bulls", 535.
[101] Wilkinson et al., 41.
[102] Bagg, 316.

systems. His program can be separated into three stages. The first of these involved the construction of a canal in 702, running from the town of Kisiri to Nineveh alongside the Khosr River, and diverted its waters to irrigate a palatial garden and orchards north of the capital; according to an inscription, Sennacherib distributed lots to the inhabitants for cultivation.[103] At some point thereafter, Sennacherib created an artificial swamp in order to regulate the waters of the Kisiri canal, images of which are depicted in reliefs from Sennacherib's palace (fig. 20), as well as two new gardens for the city.[104] The second stage, the Mount Musiri canal system, is not mentioned until 694. Here Sennacherib constructed a waterway from a large ridge northeast of Nineveh, the modern Gabal Bashiqa, near the Assyrian town of Shibaniba. The water from Shibaniba would have normally flowed directly into the Tigris south of Nineveh, but the king's canals redirected it into the Khosr, allowing Sennacherib to irrigate grain fields south of the city.[105]

The third and fourth stages of Sennacherib's water projects involved the construction of two large canal systems north of Nineveh into the foothills of the Zagros, an "intelligent combination of natural and man-made watercourses". The first of these, called the Northern system and built between 694 and 691, was a series of canals built to direct water through wadis into a canal head at the town of Tarbisu. The canal then meandered alongside the Tigris to Nineveh, irrigating the fields north of the city "for the planting of corn and sesame/flax".[106] In fact two of the intake sites for the branches of the

[103] Reade, "Waters," 61; Bagg, 316-7.
[104] See Richard D. Barnett et al., *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1998), pl. 109.
[105] Reade, "Waters", 70.
[106] Bagg, 318.

Northern system, near the villages of Faida and Maltaï, feature Assyrian rock carvings similar to those at Khinnis, which are examined in the next chapter.[107]

The Khinnis canal was the final stage, dated between 690 and 688.[108] Here the waters of the Gomel, called Atrush in its upper course, was canalized and directed southwards. The length of the Khinnis canal stretched over 100 km and involved over 50 km of excavated canals.[109] To carry the water over a wadi near the village of Jerwan, Sennacherib's engineers built a stone aqueduct with a length of 280 m and width of 16 m between the parapets.[110] Along the way the canal tapped numerous springs and smaller streams, finally emptying into a tributary of the Khosr and reaching Nineveh where it was used to irrigate grain fields south of the city.[111] In size, length and intensity of engineering, the Khinnis canal could therefore truly be considered the culminating accomplishment of Sennacherib's irrigation program.

The portion of the Khinnis inscription dealing specifically with these irrigation works (lines 8-15) first lists eighteen towns from which Sennacherib "dug and directed [canals] into the Khosr River," and from there into a canal head at Kisiri whence it flowed down to Nineveh in a waterway the king called "Sennacherib's Channel." This must describe channels dug to supplement the Kisiri-Khosr system, both in the Mt. Musiri and Northern canal systems.[112] The inscription continues:

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[107] Reade, "Waters", 159, 165.
[108] Bagg, 318; Reade, "Waters", 168.
[109] Wilkinson et al., 28.
[110] Bagg, 319; Jacobsen and Lloyd, 6-18.
[111] Bagg, 320.
[112] Bagg, 318; Reade, "Waters," 72.

> 12. The bulk of those waters (, however,) I led out from the midst of Mt. Tas, 13. a difficult mountain on the border of Armenia (Urartu). In my land they formerly called that stream […]. Now I, at the command of 14. Assur the great lord, my lord, added unto it (i.e. the canal) the waters of the mountains on its sides from the right and left 15. [and the waters of] Me…, Kukkut, (and) Bīturra, towns in its neighborhood; with stones [I…ed] the canal, (and) Sennacherib's [Channel] I called its name, 16. In addition to the waters from the springs and the waters which I had earlier secured by d[igging] (canals), […] I directed their course 17. to Nineveh, the great metropolis, my royal abode, whose site since [days of old the kings my fathers] had not enlarged 18. and whose adornment they had not undertaken.[113]

Here it seems the inscription is referring directly to the Khinnis canal system, running from "Mt. Tas" down to the Khosr. Reade identifies Tas as a mountain in the Zagros above the Atrush, from the "midst" of which the waters of the Atrush flowed down to the canal head. Jacobsen and Lloyd, investigating Sennacherib's raised aqueduct at Jerwan, encountered a number of inscriptions carved into the building stone, one of which recounted that he had added "the waters of the town of Hanusa…and the waters of the springs of the mountains to the right and left at its sides" to the canal running to the "meadows of Nineveh".[114] Reade calls the equation of Khinnis with Hanusa "irresistible," and this may be the stream which flowed south of the Khinnis relief site into the Gomel, while the waters running both from mountain springs and the upper Atrush must have been thought to come from Mt. Tas.[115]

A curious aspect of the inscription, which should be mentioned before moving on, is the manner in which it seems to rhetorically echo campaign annals. The long list of towns from which Sennacherib drew waters ("Masiti, Banbarina, Shapparishu, Kār

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[113] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 36-37.
[114] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 20.
[115] Reade, "Waters," 169.

Shamash-nāsir," etc.) is reminiscent of the lists of towns captured and destroyed in the military inscriptions, e.g. "Nagitu, Nagitu-di'bina, Hilmu, Billatu, and Hupapanu, cities belong to the king of Elam they captured" from the Door "a" bull text at Nineveh.[116] The inscription evokes the image of difficult or neglected landscapes conquered through technical ingenuity rather than force of arms.[117] In fact, Bagg has called Sennacherib's Mt. Musiri canal a "technical campaign," making use as it did of disparate water sources and springs to fill the canal through sheer engineering power.[118]

Wilkinson et al. have called the nexus of huge capital cities, irrigation and canals the "signature of the Assyrian Empire at the height of its power", and indeed Sennacherib was not the first to engage in intensive canal construction.[119] Bagg notes that the annual rainfall in northern Mesopotamia, while much higher than in the south, is still quite variable and entails a good deal of risk for agriculture. Irrigation was therefore necessary to ensure and increase yield, especially near the dense cities. The difficulty of extracting water from the upper Tigris also meant that the Assyrian kings were forced to look for sources of water at some distance, usually north of the capitals of the Neo-Assyrian period.[120] The first of these, Kalhu, was watered by a canal dug by Aššurnasirpal II. In an inscription he records that he called his canal *Patti-hegalli*, the "Canal of Abundance," and that its waters were used to irrigate orchards and grain fields, the first fruits of which

[116] Luckenbill, 75: 95-96.
[117] Liverani, "Ideology", 307.
[118] Bagg, 317.
[119] Wilkinson et al., 25.
[120] Bagg, 309.

were offered to "Assur, my lord". Although *pattu* is used in this inscription, canals were generally called *nāru*, which means "river" but was also used for major canals.[121]

Sargon II's Dur Šarrukin also needed large canals. In fact, Sargon began construction after the gods commanded him to "build a city and to dig a canal (*nāru*)," evidently two conceptually linked acts. The focus is again on agriculture in Sargon's inscriptions regarding the city, one even declaring he built it "to provide the vast land of Assyria with food to satiety."[122] The terms used in the Khinnis inscription vary: "Sennacherib's Channel" seems to be the only instance where the word *patti* appears.[123] For the most part, *nāru* is used to refer to the canals, and the Khinnis site itself is intriguingly referred to elsewhere as the *bāb nāri* or "Gate of the River/Canal".[124] The inscription also includes the phrase *mē nuhši*, "waters of abundance", a standard phrase used by Sennacherib's predecessors.[125] It was especially apt in the case of the Khinnis canal: it was the only Assyrian canal known which avoided the addition of runoff moisture to prevent flooding.[126]

Despite this rhetoric, earlier scholarship tended to downplay the economic value of these canal systems. Both David Oates and Julian Reade concluded that these programs were essentially luxuries, intended to support the royal gardens and improve the quality of life in the city rather than to supplement the agricultural economy of

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[121] Bagg, 311.
[122] Bagg, 312.
[123] Luckenbill, 79: 12.
[124] Bagg, 318, does not indicate the source for this term.
[125] Winter, "Rhetoric of Abundance,"164.
[126] Wilkinson et al., 29.

Assyria.[127] More recently, however, attention has refocused on the economic aspect of the canals and their use to benefit a much larger territory than just Nineveh and its environs.[128] The focus on the creation of orchards and grain fields north and south of the city seems to indicate that their agricultural use was, in fact, of central importance.[129] In lines 6-8 of the Khinnis inscription, the unusual passages relating to the condition of the fields and people before Sennacherib's irrigation "suggest that productive agriculture was a major motivation for the construction of canal systems."[130]

In a region with variable rainfall, irrigation canals could have a powerful, even wondrous effect on the landscape. An inscriptions relating to the Mt. Musiri canal recounts, "I had all of the orchards watered in the hot (season). In winter a thousand fields of alluvium above and below the city I had them water every year," in defiance of the seasons.[131] Sennacherib's program redirected springs and rivers onto the fields of Nineveh and thus made Assyria's water resources predictable and "amenable to human control."[132] Further away from the capital, local offtakes for irrigation water have been observed along the Khinnis canal's course that could have created large areas of arable land at some distance from Nineveh; it is possible that "this seemingly remote corner of Assyria was even more productive than the Kisiri-irrigated bank of the Khosr."[133] There is also evidence that local irrigation around provincial centers was part of the original

[127] Oates, 47-9; Reade, "Waters", 174.
[128] Jason Ur, "Sennacherib's Northern Assyrian Canals: New Insights from Satellite Imagery and Aerial Photography," *Iraq* 67 (2005), 317.
[129] Ur, 322.
[130] Wilkinson et al., 32.
[131] Reade, "Waters", 69.
[132] Ur, 320.
[133] Ur, 341.

design of the waterways from Sennacherib's day.[134] Indeed, Sennacherib's canal at Khinnis was an attempt to augment and "help" the Khosr by adding ever more water to its course, thus allowing the use of more land for cultivation.

The canals were considered great, even miraculous feats of engineering by the Assyrian kings, hence their prominent place in royal inscriptions.[135] A primary reason for advertising their existence was that they confirmed the king's control of the landscape and his ability to rule wisely. Indeed, Chandra Mukerji has observed that political legitimacy has often rested on "displays of material intelligence and stewardship over nature in order to found a right to rule on a capacity to rule well."[136] But the irrigation systems were not simply huge civic works projects, they also manifested the ingeniousness of the king in bringing distant waters into Assyria to serve the needs of state and people. The creation of this abundance was a fundamentally technical problem. And in this Sennacherib had an important model: the Mesopotamian god Enki, or Ea.

"The Technical Function of Power"

Ea was the god of "sweet waters" as well as wisdom, magic, and the arts and crafts of civilization. His domain was the subterranean freshwater ocean known as the *apsû*, whence came the fresh waters that appeared from springs and wells.[137] In an essay on the place of Enki/Ea within the Mesopotamian pantheon, Jean Bottéro relates a Sumerian myth in which Enki settles in Dilmun, the coastal region of Arabia along the

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[134] Ur, 342.
[135] Wilkinson et al.,
[136] Chandra Mukerji, "Intelligent Uses of Engineering and the Legitimacy of State Power," *Technology and Culture* 44 (2003): 675.
[137] Black and Green, 75.

Persian Gulf. There, Enki introduces fresh water into the landscape through wells, transforming desert into economically productive terrain capable of feeding the land with "useful grains".[138] Abundance, and the civilization it supported, was introduced with the sweet waters capable of sustaining it. *Irrigation* was also numbered amongst the Sumerian *me*, or "archetypes" of life, where it was directly equated with cultivation, and surrounded by a host of other *me* representing various forms of technology and craft. These included *Husbandry*, the arts of *Lighting* and *Extinguishing* fires, *Woodwork*, *Smelting*, *Bronze Work*, *Masonry*, and the *Scribal Art*, all of which were governed by *Intelligence* and *Knowledge*.[139]

Enki/Ea was therefore the god of the mechanisms that produced and regulated civilized life, and hence the god of "material intelligence", the ability to use these mechanisms well and ensure a good outcome. Bottéro stresses that intelligence was a fundamentally practical attribute for the Mesopotamians. "In a system," he writes, "where intelligence was almost entirely polarized by action, production, and success, [Ea] was considered to be some type of super-engineer who was the only one able to deal with any 'technical' problem and to find at once the most astute and most efficient solution."[140] And the inherent sense of combining thought and water into a divine figure becomes apparent if one thinks for a moment on the nature of fresh water: it flows through the landscape, around or over or through obstacles, always reaching its goal with clever

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[138] Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 235.
[139] Bottéro, 238.
[140] Bottéro, 239.

flexibility rather than brute force.[141] At a later point Ea was conceptualized as the vizier of Enlil, chief deity of the pantheon (and brute force incarnate), "at the side and just below the holder of rule," well-placed to direct and shape raw power into beneficial and productive forms. Bottéro remarks:

> What he does, what he has to do, is never defined in terms of power, of government or of political authority, but only in terms of organization, of control, of the promotion of life and, to that goal, of intelligence and technical and practical success– and all this, always, in supreme interests of the divine society. In the end he was portrayed as being at the head of an enormous and extremely complicated mechanism, which he guarded and animated.[142]

He was, in other words, the ideal divinity for a culture in which intelligence and knowledge were "polarized by production and action, and [were] materialized equally well in the 'practical judgment' of the artisans," a civilization based on technique.[143]

In the same manner that governments build "an infrastructure of experts to develop the intelligence to employ nature for advantage,"[144] so did Ea reveal his ingenious inventions to mankind through lesser supernatural beings, the *apkallus* or antediluvian sages.[145] The late Babylonian priest Berossos, writing about the year 300 BCE for a Greek audience, recounts a legend of how the fish-like *apkallu* Oannes appeared in ancient times and taught humanity the arts of civilization. Other texts tell us that there were seven *apkallu*, each attached to the rule of an ancient king, who acted as advisors in the same manner as Ea did among the gods.[146] The sage Adapa, compared

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[141] Jacobsen, 146.
[142] Bottéro, 246.
[143] Bottéro, 250.
[144] Mukerji, "Legitimacy", 675.
[145] Black and Green, 76.
[146] Bottéro, 247.

with Sennecherib in the bull inscription above and numbered among these pre-Flood experts, is titled thus: Ea "made broad understanding perfect in [Adapa]/ to disclose the design of the land…a sage –nobody rejects his word–/ clever, extra wise."[147] In fact, one of Ea's traditional titles was *apkal ilī*, the *apkallu* of the gods.[148] The *apkallus* of mythic times also found a parallel in the class of scholars and advisors that attended the Assyrian court, the *ummānus*, which simply meant "master" or "expert."[149] It could refer both to scribes and sages, as well as craftsmen and artisans. The *ummānu* was "the illustrious sage, the deep spirit who knows all, who could decide everything with justice and wisdom, who often could promote or invent new technologies."[150] Writing, invention and technique were thus one, the civilizing arts that allowed all problems to be solved efficiently and with expertise.

"There is substantial evidence," writes Steven Holloway, "that the Sargonid kings cultivated a 'professional' image of technical and informational competency."[151] Yet even among this group Sennacherib stands out as a king whose public self-presentation rested on expertise and a "direct personal interest in engineering".[152] One of his clay prism inscriptions concerning the gardens he constructed in Nineveh relates:

> I, Sennacherib…knowledgeable in all kinds of work, took much advice and deep thought over making that work: great pillars of copper, colossal striding lions, such as no previous king had ever constructed before me, with the technical skill

147 Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 184.
148 Bottéro, 249.
149 Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 151.
150 Bottéro, 248.
151 Steven W. Holloway, *Assur is King! Assur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 83.
152 Stephenie Dalley and John Peter Oleson, "Sennacherib, Archimedes and the Water Screw: The Context of Invention in the Ancient World," *Technology and Culture* 44 (2003): 5.

> that Ninshiku [another name for Ea] brought to perfection in me, and…I invented a technique for copper and did it skillfully. I created clay molds as if by divine intelligence…and I poured copper into them over and over again; I made castings of them, as perfectly as if they had only weighed half a shekel each…[153]

It is not simply new invention that is stressed in this passage, but *skillful* invention, invention both marvelous and useful. Here the "heroic priority" motif is applied to metallurgical practices, and the king "in his own wisdom " creates new techniques to serve his building programs.[154] There has even been some discussion of the notion that Sennacherib may have invented the water screw several hundred years before Archimedes, based on descriptions in the same text of a clever device used to lift water to his gardens at Nineveh.[155]

Jacobsen and Lloyd suggest that Sennacherib's technical interests were influenced through his personal involvement in the construction projects of his father at Dur Šarrukin,[156] and Sennacherib's inscriptions evince an interest in building accounts unprecedented among the Assyrian kings.[157] He assiduously sent out teams of surveyors in search of new sources of timber and building stone,[158] and is the only Assyrian king to give detailed information on quarrying procedure and terminology, a major arena for which was in fact the quarry at Khinnis.[159] Sennacherib was particularly interested in finding unusual and rare forms of stone while on campaign in distant lands, and describes

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153 Dalley and Oleson, 7.
154 Tadmor, "World Domination", 61.
155 Dalley and Oleson, 24.
156 Jacobsen and Lloyd, 31.
157 John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 16.
158 H.W.F. Saggs, *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), 182.
159 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 96; see for example Luckenbill, 108: 65.

the quality and appearance of these stones in great detail.[160] Sennacherib's interest in all these crafts even led H.W.F. Saggs to label him "a typical technocrat".[161]

Mehmet-Ali Ataç has suggested that in the lists of the antediluvian kings of Mesopotamia, which pair rulers with their corresponding sages, there is evidence they may have originally been joined, and hence the ideal system was one in which "the king was also the sage."[162] It is a paired function Sennacherib seems to have consciously evoked in his great building descriptions and his declamations of his ingenious and innovative skills. At the very least, he was a monarch interested in "broadcasting the prestige and imagery of technological success, the tangible evidence of human triumph over the forces of nature."[163] Indeed, his irrigation works "conquered" the land through technical skill. And as the description of Nineveh before Sennacherib's irrigation projects reveals, he wished to present himself as a benevolent problem solver whose innovations achieved results, the very model of an *apkallu*. Khinnis represented, in a sense, the climax of the king's genius.

The Blooming of Nineveh

"Working reveal[s] truth,"[164] and the next section of the Khinnis inscription deals with the "tangible" success of Sennacherib's canals. It runs as follows:

> 18. At this time I, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, first among all princes, who [marched safely] from the rising sun 19. to the setting sun, [by means of] the waters from the canals which I had caused to be dug […ed] Nineveh together

[160] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 99.
[161] Saggs, 182.
[162] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 167.
[163] Dalley and Oleson, 25.
[164] Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 222.

> with its neighborhoods; gardens, vineyards, 20. all kinds of […], …products of all the mountains, the fruits of all lands, and 21. […I plan]ted. Up to (where) the waters could not reach I let them out over the thirsty ground, so that its vegetation… 22. […] of all the orchards; on entering the lands(?) above (the city) and be[low(?)] from the midst of the town of Tarbisu 23. to the "town of the Assyrian" I irrigated annually (so that it was possible) to cultivate grain and sesame.[165]

After restating the territorial epithet that confirms his peaceful territorial dominion, Sennacherib enumerates the results of his program. Although fragmentary, the passage describes first the blooming of the city itself (the watering of orchards and gardens) and its environs (lands "above the city and below," fields of grain and sesame), brought about by the king's subjection of nature to human control ("I watered annually").

"The foundation of a new capital," writes Mario Liverani, "is the apex in the action of a creator king. It is the apex because instead of taking place at the periphery…it occurs exactly at the center."[166] While Sennacherib did not create Nineveh in the same manner that Sargon founded Dur Šarrukin from the ground up, his work was to make the city worthy of its status with the tangible signs of prosperity and splendor, to "muster in stone and brick" the authority of Sennacherib's political regime through history's first "Haussmannization".[167] This in itself had a political dimension: a magnificent capital plays just as active a role in the maintenance of empire as military campaigns, overawing visitors with dazzling vegetal growth and impressive monuments.[168] The references in the king's building accounts to the quarrying of unusual stones on distant campaigns also

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165 Jacobsen and Lloyd, 37.
166 Liverani, "Ideology", 309.
167 Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 203-4.
168 Russell, "Bulls", 537.

points to Nineveh as the place where the Assyrian Empire symbolically processed its resources, turning the chaos of the periphery into order at the center.[169] The center projected this civilizing process back to the periphery as well; the site of Khinnis itself was a part of Nineveh, in so far as it was connected to the waterway which flowed directly back to the capital, and was thus conceptually an arm of the center flung out into the Assyrian hinterland.

The reification of empire at Nineveh occurred not just in the importation of stone or timber but of distant landscapes themselves. During the reign of Sargon II, a new form of garden is attested called the *kirimahhu*, in which the Assyrian kings claimed to remake the land in imitation of foreign countries. While the importation of exotic flora and fauna was an old practice first attested in the reign of Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 BCE), the *kirimahhu* modified the landscape using lakes and artificial hills. Sargon describes his garden as, "A great park like the Mount Amanus wherein all kinds of aromatic trees from the land of Hatti (Syria) and all the fruit of the mountains were planted."[170] Sennacherib also laid out *kirimahhus*, and describes them in essentially the same terms, as "A great park like unto Mt. Amanus, wherein were set out all kinds of herbs and orchard fruits, trees such as grow on the mountains and in Chaldea, I planted by (the palace's) side."[171] All the Sargonids compared their gardens with "Mt. Amanus", a mountain in Syria to which the Assyrian kings often ventured in order to cut cedar logs. With the creation of

[169] Liverani, "Ideology", 312.
[170] Bagg, 315.
[171] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 33.

the *kirimahhu*, this distant and prestigious landscape was brought directly into the heart of the empire.

As the mention of "Chaldea" above indicates, Sennacherib also attempted to replicate the landscape of southern Mesopotamia in his public works. During his first southern campaigns in 702 and 700, Sennacherib ventured into the swamps of Babylonia hunting for two enemy kings, and there "visited a country unlike anything else in his experience."[172] The landscape was a watery wilderness filled with canebrakes and small islands, no doubt exceptionally difficult to search. Sometime later, Sennacherib needed a means of arresting the flow of the Khosr River canal, as the Door "c" text from Court VI relates: "To arrest the flow of these waters I made a swamp and set out a canebrake within it. *Igirū*-birds, wild swine, and stags I turned loose therein."[173] Chaldean swamps suddenly appeared just outside the capital.

In fact, the whole project of constructing canals for irrigation, beyond economic benefit, may have been predicated on the desire to evoke images of Babylonia. The political position of Babylon and its relationship to Assyria was an extremely sensitive issue during Sennacherib's reign, as is explored later in this chapter, but the creation of huge cities surrounded by gardens and fields watered by extensive canal networks may have been a conscious emulation of Babylonian urbanism.[174] Stephanie Dalley has argued that the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" described by Classical authors was in fact a feature of Sennacherib's Nineveh, irrigated by bronze screws lifting water to the upper

[172] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 34.
[173] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 35.
[174] Wilkinson et al., 31-2.

levels, and that their placement in Babylon was a confused response to the emulation of that city in Nineveh's design.[175] By and large, the "Assyrian kings viewed the landscape as mutable, a medium for symbolizing their mastery of exotic foreign landscapes by recreating them in the core of the Assyrian heartland."[176] Even more expansively, Liverani remarks that the capital's ability to siphon resources from the periphery allowed the center to "take on the form of a microcosm, which sums up the elements of the whole world."[177]

Intriguingly, the rhetoric of Sennacherib's inscriptions claims that the exotic plants and animals placed in his artificial landscapes grew *better* than they would have in their home environments. The Door "c" text relates how a garden created by Sennacherib to resemble "the land of Hatti" was filled with herbs and myrrh plants "among which fruitfulness was greater than in their (natural) habitat." In the description of the artificial swamp in the same text, Sennacherib proclaims:

> By command of the god, within the orchards more than in their (native) habitat the vine, every fruit, sirdu-trees, and herbs grew luxuriantly. The cypress and the mulberry, all kinds of trees, grew large and sent out many shoots; the canebreaks throve mightily. The birds of heaven, the *Igirū*-birds, whose home is far away, built their nests; the wild swine and stags brought forth young in abundance.[178]

The stress on the tangible evidence of growth –the shoots of the plants, the nests of the birds, the young of swine and stag– proclaims that Sennacherib's reign encouraged

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[175] Stephenie Dalley, "Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled," *Iraq* 56 (1994): 45-58.
[176] Wilkinson et al., 30.
[177] Liverani, "Ideology", 314.
[178] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 34-5; Luckenbill, 114: 18-19, 115: 50-59.

abundance beyond what was natural, assisted by his special relationship with "the god". This marvelous prosperity was also material proof of his skill and competence as a ruler.

Yet Sennacherib was interested in more than just the "mastery of foreign landscapes". His primary concern seems to have been to *use* these artificial landscapes in the service of the people of Nineveh and the Assyrian state. The Door "c" text quoted above proclaims that Sennacherib's artificial swamp was not merely decorative:

> The mulberry and the cypress, the product of the orchards, (and) the reeds of the brakes which were in the swamp I cut down and used as desired, in the building of my royal palaces. The wool-bearing trees they sheared and wove into garments.[179]

Likewise, lines 19-23 of the Khinnis inscription focus squarely on the agricultural abundance the canal systems create. Not only gardens but vineyards, orchards and grain fields benefit, and the very names of the gates of Nineveh emphasize this focus on agrarian abundance. The gate facing the town of Shibaniba (where the Mt. Musiri canal system originated) was called "The Choicest of Grain and Flocks are ever within it," and Jason Ur observes that the area below the town must have been a "major breadbasket" for Nineveh.[180] The city's northernmost gate was called "Brining the Produce of the Mountains," commanding as it did the road to the Zagros.[181]

In Sennacherib's inscriptions, engineering is a fundamental adjunct of state power, and clearly the king saw great value in advertising the success of his irrigation and landscaping projects. In a sense, he was claiming a legitimacy derived from possessing the expertise to create a "second nature", which became superabundant under his

[179] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 35; Luckenbill, 115-6: 60-64.
[180] Ur, 324.
[181] Reade, "Waters", 52.

stewardship.[182] Irrigation projects vastly increased the area of cultivable land, water supplies filled the regions around Nineveh with grain fields and orchards, and the city itself was embellished with luxurious gardens that replicated distant lands for the pleasure of king and people.

Moreover, the creation of artificial landscapes was not merely a means of expressing the scope of Sennacherib's power, but also employed for the benefit of the populace at large, and it is interesting to note the manner in which his rhetorical self-presentation has resurfaced in scholarship on Sennacherib's reign. Russell, for example, stresses the peaceful nature of Sennacherib's reign: with the exception of the Babylonian problem he never campaigned twice in the same area, and in stark contrast to his predecessors his campaigns seem to have been defensive in nature.[183] The move of the capital to Nineveh was an "imminently practical" action, and the botanical specimens of his gardens were put to pragmatic uses.[184] No doubt Reade's assessment of the king as the "far-sighted" creator of a stable imperial system would have deeply gratified Sennacherib.[185]

Divine Aid

After the explosion of agricultural activity at Nineveh described by the Khinnis inscription, the next section of the text describes both an oath and an unusual occurrence that attended the opening of the new canal. In the oath, Sennacherib entrusts "what I have

[182] Mukerji, "Legitimacy", 658.
[183] Russell, "Bulls", 535 n. 35; Tadmor, "World Dominion", 61.
[184] Reade, "Monuments", 163; Oates, 51.
[185] Reade, "Waters", 47.

planned" to his sons, presumably his royal descendants. He swears by Aššur that it was he who completed the canal's construction in a year and three months. The passage following relates:

> 27. To open that canal I sent an *āshipu*-priest and a *kalū*-priest, and…Carnelian, lapis lazuli, *mushgarru*, *hulalū*, (and) UD.ASH-stones, 28. precious stones, a BAL.GI-fish and a SUHUR-fish, the likeness of […] of gold, herbs, (and) choice oils to Ea, lord of the springs, fountains, and 29. meadows, (to) Enbilulu, lord of rivers, (and to) Eneimbal I presented as gifts. I prayed to the great gods, and they 30. heard my prayers and prospered the work of my hands. The sluice gate like(?) a […] or a flail was forced open inward(?) and 31. let in the waters of abundance. By the work of the engineer its (sluice) gate had not been opened when the gods caused the waters to dig [a hole] therein.
> After I had inspected 32. the canal and had put it in order, to the great gods who go at my side and who uphold my reign sleek oxen and 33. fat sheep I offered as pure sacrifices. Those men who had dug that canal I clothed with linen (and) brightly colored (woolen) garments. 34. Golden rings, daggers of gold, I put upon them.[186]

Sennacherib's ceremonial opening of the canal, attended by sacrifices of precious objects to Ea and Enbilulu, seems to have been interrupted by a mishap. Before the engineers could open the sluice gates, the water burst through a breach and spilled into the canal. The event was interpreted as a good omen, an indication that the gods were impatient to see the canal completed and had thus "caused the waters to dig". Thereafter, Sennacherib inspected the canal for damage and put things in order, offered new sacrifices, and rewarded the workmen and engineers.[187]

Of special interest in this passage is the manner it highlights the importance of divine agency in Sennacherib's civil works projects. The gods are already foregrounded by the invocation at the very beginning of the inscription, and Sennacherib here portrays them as enthusiastic collaborators in his designs. As befits the opening of a waterway that

[186] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 38; Luckenbill, 81-2: 27-34.
[187] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 41.

will provide the "waters of abundance" to Assyria, the sacrifices are directed towards Ea and Enbilulu, a god of rivers and the divine inspector of dikes and canals,[188] as well as to Eneimbal, who may be an obscure god of canal digging.[189] The relationship of the Assyrian kings with their national deities is a complicated subject, and detailed treatment beyond the purview of this thesis, but we can examine aspects of that relationship in an attempt to illuminate the place of the divine at Khinnis.

In ancient Mesopotamia, divine agency was essentially expressed through the imagery of royal power. The gods decreed effective decisions on how the universe would operate in the same manner that the king decreed laws, and hence the equivalence was not a "lyrical metaphor, but a real analogy, i.e. a means of knowing: the gods were indeed the authors and governors of the universe and of each of its elements, as the kings owned and were responsible for their territory and for all their resources and each of their subjects."[190] In Assyria, the most important god was Aššur, whose cult city Assur was the historical core of the Assyrian state: the name "Assyria" itself is derived from "Land of Aššur." He was at the summit of the divine hierarchy, and the Assyrian king functioned both as his high priest and viceroy on earth.[191]

The Assyrian kings maintained a "persistent modesty" before the gods. According to Ataç, the earliest rulers of Assyria never used the title "king" (*šarrum*) but rather "prince" (*rubûm*), which was retained until the end of the Middle Assyrian period (ca.

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188 Black and Green, 76.
189 Jacobsen and Lloyd, 38 n. 40.
190 Bottéro, 224.
191 A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 99.

1350-1000 BCE), and the title *iššaku Aššur*, "vice-regent of Aššur," the king's primary sacerdotal epithet through the Neo-Assyrian period.[192] Each monarch's coronation, in fact, was accompanied by the ritual acclamation "Aššur is king!"[193] At an early stage the king was essentially conceptualized as a princely assistant to Aššur, an "attentive prince," and even into the period of the empire he served to implement the god's ordinances. Divine approval, therefore, was a central aspect of royal legitimacy in Assyria, where an important element of internal politics was the "determination of the divine will and its exploitation as legitimizing authority".[194] The king's relationship with the gods (and Aššur especially) was intimate, and inscriptions often portrayed the king's successes as divine favor and aid. Sennacherib, for example, claims to have discovered one of his new quarries for building stone by divine revelation,[195] and also claimed that divine aid empowered his armies in campaigns in the south.[196] Truly, the titulary of the Aššur stele above could call the king "well acquainted with the gods of Assyria."[197] The titulary of the Khinnis inscription emphasizes Sennacherib's role as the "endower" of the god's cults in the context of remaking the landscape. Here, as Liverani has observed, in shaping the landscape in an almost divine fashion, "operating in the very field of divine

[192] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 132.
[193] Oppenheim, 99.
[194] Holloway, 83.
[195] Russell, "Bulls", 115.
[196] Elnathan Weissert, "Creating a Political Climate: Literary Allusions to *Enūma Eliš* in Sennacherib's Account of the Battle of Halule," in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten: XXXIXe Rencontre assyriologique internationale Heidelberg, 6.-10. Juli 1992*, ed. Hartmut Waetzoldt and Harald Hauptmann (Heidelberg: Heidelberge Orientverlag, 1997), 195.
[197] Liverani, "Critique", 248.

pertinence, Sennacherib seems to be preoccupied to remember that his own function is only instrumental, as a 'provider' (*zāninu*), administrator of the gods' properties."[198]

We might, however, also approach the notion of divine approval from another perspective. Liverani has elsewhere called Aššur the "hypostasis of the Assyrian kingship," asserting that the god is in fact the ideological expression of a role in concrete and anthropomorphic form. As such, "divine approval is not the *cause* of the legitimacy of the action, it is clearly its *expressed form*."[199] While it would be very shortsighted to dismiss all mentions of divine approval as merely legitimating rubberstamp, it might also be shortsighted to regard Aššur as "merely" a god. Indeed, compared with other deities, Aššur's inseparability from city and state is unusual: his only temples appear to have been the *bīt Aššur* in his city and possibly others at Kalhu and Nineveh, he is never consulted in oracular texts, and his worship seems to have been unknown outside Assyria.[200]

Aššur was very much a tutelary divinity: Piotr Michalowski remarks that the deep interest that Aššur took in the political expansion of Assyria is suggested by the Assyrian genre of historical annals in the form of letters from the king to Aššur.[201] Indeed, the cult of Aššur acted as a kind of tenacious "fountainhead" of Assyrian imperialism.[202] Beginning in the Middle Assyrian period the provisioning of Aššur's temple was "a duty

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198 Liverani, "Critique", 246.
199 Liverani, "Ideology," 301.
200 Holloway, 65-6.
201 Piotr Michalowski, "Presence at the Creation," in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard and Piotr Steinkeller (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 389-90.
202 Oppenheim, 168.

imposed by rota on the provinces" and seems to indicate subordinate status to the center.[203] These were lands that had been subordinated to the "yoke of Aššur," in Assyrian terminology.[204] Furthermore, the Assyrian kings undertook at their coronation to follow Aššur's directive to expand Assyria through annual campaigns.[205]

In this sense, as a hypostasis of Assyrian monarchy, we might think of Aššur as the ideal vision of what it is kings *do*. Aššur is thus not simply a state god, but the apotheosis of the ruler's role and responsibilities. His is the compulsion to expand the empire, to impose tribute on foreign lands and peoples, to undertake campaign and build great cities and civil works. Sennacherib acts "at the command of Aššur" not only because he is the god's viceroy but also because he is a kind of protégé or representation of the god, crowned to implement Aššur's king-like will and directives. He does so as an "attentive prince" who is compelled to undertake what Aššur directs. When Aššur's aid or protection is invoked it is not just a king asking the god's favor, I would argue, but also a king asking the god to imbue his acts with the appropriateness of what an ideal king accomplishes. This is an important theme in the Great Relief, where god and king confront one another, and is examined in the following chapters.

In her book *Impossible Engineering*, which analyzes the construction of the massive Canal du Midi in southern France during the reign of Louis XIV, Chandra Mukerji includes an eyewitness account of the ceremonies that attended the beginning of

[203] Holloway, 67-8.
[204] Holloway, 81.
[205] Holloway, xv.

construction, which sounds uncannily like the description of the opening of the Khinnis canal:

> They shouted out cries of joy, "Vive le Roy,"…The archbishop of Toulouse took the first two stones in hand. He blessed them, giving one to the president of Parliament, and the second to the Capitouls. A little mortar was taken with a trowel of gold from a silver plate, and the stones were placed. To the joy of the people, commemorative medals were thrown into the crowd, and Riquet had wine and liquor distributed…God was present…it was the 17th of November, but it was like a spring day, which people took as a good sign for the project.[206]

God was surely present in the minds of those assembled for the opening of the Khinnis canal as well. The gods impatiently opened the gate before it could be readied by the mortal Assyrian engineers, manifesting the "rightness" of the canal in the same manner that the opening of the Canal du Midi was attended by unusually warm weather. Likewise, both ceremonies involved the distribution of valuables to those present. It is interesting too that Sennacherib states the gods "prospered the work of my hands" in line 30. The gods do not do things for Sennacherib, but rather help him actualize what he himself has undertaken, as those who "go at my side and uphold my reign." In Liverani's formulation, because what Sennacherib does is kingly and correct, the gods (and especially Aššur) manifest their approval and assistance for it.

Thus a central aspect of Sennacherib's claim to legitimate rule, and of the inscription and reliefs at Khinnis as a whole, lay in his pious expertise in shaping the landscape, in husbanding the Land of Aššur in accordance with the will of the gods. In Sennacherib's formulation, the Assyrian king emphatically nurtured the land's abundance as much as he expanded its borders through state violence. The element of divine

[206] Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 78.

sanction too is a particularly important issue within the historical context of Sennacherib's reign, as it witnessed what Ataç has called a "theological revolution."[207] Initially, almost all of Sennacherib's construction programs seem to have focused on civil works and the remaking of Nineveh. After his destruction of Babylon, however, a flurry of building activity began at Assur, which drastically altered and expanded the sanctuary of the chief Assyrian god, and which also seems to have incorporated Babylonian elements into the royal stelae.[208] It is to this darker, more violent aspect of his reign that we turn next.

Halule and *Enūma Eliš*

After the opening of the canal, the Khinnis inscription somewhat jarringly turns to Sennacherib's military operations in Babylonia, specifically to the battle of Halule and the subsequent siege and sack of Babylon. Before examining the portrayal of these events in the inscription, however, it may be useful to briefly enumerate the chronology of these events as they have been reconstructed by recent scholarship.

If Sennacherib's reign was remembered for the creation of one city, it was equally remembered for the destruction of another.[209] This was Babylon, the religious and political heart of southern Mesopotamia. Babylon and Assyria had a long and complex history of cultural exchange, and the Assyrians had adopted many cultural and religious practices from their southern neighbors. Marduk, for example, the chief deity of Babylon,

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[207] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 61.
[208] Reade, "Monuments", 164.
[209] A.K. Grayson, "Assyria: Sennacherib and Esarhaddon," in *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume III Part 2*, ed. by John Boardman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 103.

was also an important god in Assyria, and at various periods the Assyrians had considered the Babylonians allies, vassals or subjects.[210] Indeed, the sensitivity of the Assyrian elites towards the "Babylonian Question" was no doubt due to the manner in which it challenged their cultural self-understanding.[211] Prior to Sennacherib's reign, the most recent episode in this troubled relationship was the outright conquest of Babylonia by Sargon II, who expelled the Chaldean king Marduk-apla-iddina II (the biblical Merodach-baladan) from the city and proclaimed himself king of Babylon in 709. He appointed governors for the region, thus reducing Babylonia to the status of a province controlled directly by Assyrian administration.[212]

Sennacherib's campaigns appear to have been defensive in nature, meant to consolidate and maintain his father Sargon's conquests.[213] Babylonia was the most restive of these acquisition, and the "Babylonian Question" dominated Sennacherib's attention throughout his reign. Sennacherib had taken up direct rule of Babylon like his father after his accession, but in 703 two successive revolts against Assyrian authority brought Marduk-apla-iddina II once again to the Babylonian throne. Within months, Sennacherib had defeated a coalition assembled by this king, and drove the would-be ruler of Babylon into hiding in the marshes of southern Mesopotamia.[214]

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[210] Marc Van De Mieroop, "Revenge, Assyrian Style," *Past and Present* 179 (2003): 7.
[211] Peter Machinist, "The Assyrians and Their Babylonian Problem: Some Reflections," in *Wissenchaftskolleg zu Berlin: Jahrbuch 1984/85* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1985), 362.
[212] Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 182.
[213] Roaf, 185.
[214] J.A. Brinkman, "Sennacherib's Babylonian Problem: An Interpretation," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 25 (1973): 91.

Sennacherib now employed a new strategy by placing Bēl-ibni on the throne, a native Babylonian who had been raised at the Assyrian court and would theoretically remain loyal to Assyrian interests.[215] Yet Marduk-apla-iddina remained active in the south, and Sennacherib campaigned in the Babylonian marshes in 700 against Chaldean tribes loyal to the rebel. He removed the unreliable Bēl-ibni, drove Marduk-apla-iddina from the region for good, and installed his son Ashur-nādin-shumi as king of Babylon.[216] This solution seems to have lasted for about six years; in 694 Sennacherib undertook yet another campaign against the Chaldeans loyal to Marduk-apla-iddina and their Elamite allies. Sennacherib now used boats, built and manned by Phoenicians and dragged overland from the Tigris to the Arahtu canal, and sailed southward to attack his enemies across the marshes in Elamite territory. While the Assyrians were thus engaged, however, the Elamites raided northern Babylonia and captured Ashur-nādin-shumi, with Babylonian assistance.[217] Sennacherib's son disappeared, presumably executed by the king of Elam.

After one pretender to the Babylonian throne was defeated and captured by the Assyrians, a Chaldean named Mushēzib-Marduk quickly took his place. He assembled a Babylonian-Chaldean-Elamite coalition, and Sennacherib's inscriptions claim that the Babylonians used funds from the treasury of the temple of Marduk to hire the services of the latter. In 691 Sennacherib met their army in battle at a place called Halule.[218] There

[215] Brinkman, 91.
[216] Grayson, 107.
[217] Roaf, 185; Brinkman, 92.
[218] Brinkman, 92; Luckenbill,

are conflicting accounts of the result of this battle, which both sides claimed as a great victory, and while the Assyrian claim has been historically discounted whatever reverse Sennacherib suffered could not have been serious. By 690 Babylon was under siege by Assyrian troops, and a legal document from the period paints a grim picture of life under these circumstances:

> …the land was gripped by siege, famine, hunger, want, and hard times. Everything was changed and reduced to nothing…The city gates were barred, and a person could not go out in any of the four directions. The corpses of men, with no one to bury them, filled the squares of Babylon.[219]

In 689 the city fell to Sennacherib, and J.A. Brinkman eloquently describes the mental state that the city's conqueror could conceivably have been in:

> [Sennacherib's] forbearance had been taxed by his unsuccessful attempts at governing the land, by the recurring revolts, by the loss of his son, and now by a protracted two-year offensive. Gone was the reverential young king who had inquired solicitously of diviners whether his father had offended the deities of Babylonia. In his place was an exasperated monarch and vengeful father, whose wrath was not to be turned aside by considerations of an ancient culture or by veneration of gods whose treasuries had mustered troops against him.[220]

After the sack, described in brutal detail by the Khinnis inscription (and quoted at length below), Babylon remained essentially king-less for the remaining eight years of Sennacherib's reign, and the devastation wrought by his armies was left unrepaired.[221] It was not until Sennacherib's own violent death in 681, at the hands of one of his sons angered by changes in the succession, that his successor Esarhaddon (r. 681-669) began the task of rebuilding the city.

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[219] Quoted in Brinkman, 93.
[220] Brinkman, 94.
[221] Grayson, 109.

Turning back to the inscription, the next section deals with the battle of Halule. The battle took place "in the same year with the opening/flowing of that canal which I dug," and was fought against the coalition of the kings of Elam and Babylon (line 35). At "the command of Aššur, the great lord, my lord," Sennacherib's troops entered the fray and "shattered" their armies (lines 36-37). Curiously, in line 40 the narrative suddenly shifts from 1st to 3rd person:

> 40. And they did not come back. Thereupon Sennacherib became violently angry and as he ordered (his army) to turn toward Elam, 41. fear and terror were poured out over all of Elam, and they left their land and, to save their lives, like the eagle 42. betook themselves to the inaccessible mountain(s), and, like unto birds that one pursues, their hearts were rent. To the day of their death 43. they did not come out (lit. open any way) nor did they make war.[222]

As mentioned above, the outcome of the battle of Halule is not known to have been a decisive victory for either side; more likely it was a defeat for the Assyrians. As such, the royal scribes would have needed to transfigure what had been at best an awkward, bloody stalemate into a victory for the king. This was especially true for the first prism edition of an account of the battle, written a few months afterwards while military operations were still ongoing. Elnathan Weissert has pointed out the literary allusions to *Enūma Eliš*, the Babylonian epic of creation, in this first account of the battle. *Enūma Eliš* tells of the creation of the cosmos and the gods from the primordial oceanic monster Tiamat and her husband Apsû, their attempts to destroy the gods they had engendered, and their eventual

[222] Luckenbill, 82-3: 41-43. It is interesting that the switch in narrative persepective takes place at the same moment that Sennacherib's armies "pour" fear and terror out over the land of Elam, a flood of woe. It is tempting to see this watery metaphor as part of the broader hydrological theme at Khinnis, but I have been unable to verify Luckenbill's translation. The relevant line is transliterated: *hat-tu pu-luh-tu eli* ^{l}*Elamti*^{ki} *ka-li-šu-un it-ta-bi-ik-ma*

defeat by Marduk, the city god of Babylon who in the course of the narrative is given full authority over the cosmos in order to do battle with Tiamat.

The allusions consist of numerous references to the vocabulary and style of *Enūma Eliš*: the Babylonians who rebel against Assyrian authority are described as "wicked demons" (*gallê lemnūti*), the same phrase used to describe Tiamat's forces, while Mushēzib-Marduk is compared to Kingu, the puppet ruler whom Tiamat attempts to appoint over the gods.[223] It is known that an "Assyrianized" version of *Enūma Eliš* was completed by the end of Sennacherib's reign, in which Aššur had been substituted for Marduk, and Weissert remarks that the rhetorical intent of the prism account must have been to parallel the god's battle against Tiamat and the forces of chaos with Sennacherib's attempts to pacify Babylonia.[224] Indeed, we know from a textual description that the gates of the *bīt akīti* Sennacherib built in Assur featured a relief of the battle fought between order and primordial chaos, in which the king himself was pictured assisting Aššur and the gods.[225] Through these allusions in the prism text, the clash with the Babylonians at Halule assumes mythic dimensions.[226]

The Khinnis inscription, however, does not contain any of these references in its composition. The Babylonians are not demonized as they were in the prism inscription. This may have simply been necessary due to the spatial limitations imposed by the Khinnis site. Weissert observes that this may have also been a factor of hindsight: by the

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[223] Weissert, 193; see also W.G. Lambert, "The Assyrian Recension of Enūma Eliš," in *Assyrien im Wandel der Zeiten*, 77-9.
[224] Weissert, 195.
[225] Machinist, 356; Reade, "Ideology", 332.
[226] Weissert, 197.

time the Khinnis text had been composed the outcome of the long war in the south was already decided, firmly in Sennacherib's favor, and hence there was no need to couch the war effort in mythical rhetoric.[227] What is important to bear in mind is that the battle of Halule and the subsequent sack of Babylon were surrounded with almost apocalyptic rhetoric. In particular, Weissert alleges that the use of this hyped, mythical phraseology created "the right political climate in Assyria for the impending materialization of Sennacherib's horrendous plans" for Babylon once it was under his control.[228]

The Sack of Babylon

The next section of the Khinnis inscription forms a conceptual opposite, a double, to the earlier articulations of Sennacherib's nurture of Assyria and the construction of the canals, and is worth quoting at length:

> 43. In my second campaign I advanced swiftly against Babylonia, upon whose 44. conquest I had determined, like the oncoming of a storm I broke loose, and I overwhelmed it like a hurricane. I completely invested that city, with 45. mines and engines my hands (took the city), the plunder…his powerful…whether small or great, I left none. With their corpses 46. I filled the city squares (wide places). Shuzubu, king of Babylonia, together with his family and his (nobles) I carried off alive into my land. 47. The wealth of that city, –silver, gold, precious stones, property and goods, I counted into the hands of my people and they made it their own. 48. The gods dwelling therein, –the hands of my people took them, and they smashed them. Their property and goods they seized. Adad and Shala, 49. the gods of Ekallâte, whom Marduk-nâdin-ahê, king of Babylon, in the reign of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, had seized and carried off to Babylon, 50. after four hundred and eighteen years I brought them out of Babylon and returned them to their place in Ekallâte. The city and (its) houses, 51. –from its foundation to its walls, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and outer wall, temples and gods, temple-tower of brick and earth, as many as there were, 52. I razed and dumped them into the Arahtu-canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals, I flooded its site (lit. ground) with water, and the very 53. foundations thereof (lit. the structure of its foundations) I destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come, the site of that city,

[227] Wiessert, 200-2.
[228] Weissert, 202.

> and (its) temples and gods, 54. might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow.[229]

As Peter Machinist has observed, Sennacherib's emphasis on the rooting out of the city's foundations and smashing of gods and temples is no mere conquest but "an effort to neutralize, on its own soil, the imperium of Babylon."[230] The trope is one of "cosmogonic reversal,"[231] a kind of "topocide" that attempted to eradicate the city forever.

Indeed, the passage inverts many of the usages that go before it, but nevertheless maintains Sennacherib's self-presentation as we have constructed it thus far. Water, of course, is the central player: Sennacherib breaks loose "like the oncoming of a storm" or a hurricane (line 44), and the wreckage of the city is dumped into the Arahtu Canal (line 52). Here canals are dug not to prosper but to annihilate and wash away, to "make its destruction more complete than that by a flood" (line 53), and that the city and its gods and temples should be forgotten forever Sennacherib claims to have made it a "meadow" (line 54). Sennacherib's role as the ingenious expert is also invoked, as his technical ability ("my hands") is used for "mines and engines" to invest Babylon's walls, and the skills necessary to dig the Khinnis canal would also have been used to flood Babylon with destructive waters. The result is the creation of fertile fields (meadows) in both cases, though in the latter instance the remains of the city are ghoulishly submerged under newly-cultivable land.

Marc Van De Mieroop has analyzed the comparisons made between the two cities in Sennacherib's inscriptions, and has called the destruction of Babylon the "negative

[229] Luckenbill, 83-4: 43-54.
[230] Machinist, 360.
[231] Holloway, 122.

parallel" of the construction of Nineveh. The cities function rhetorically as doubles, or mirror images, in the literary construct that is the Khinnis inscription.[232] Besides the destructive use of canals, Van De Mieroop also notes that in the inscription Sennacherib says he built a vast wall around the city (lines 5-6), while at Babylon he tore down its walls (line 51).[233] This was no act of simple destruction: city walls were an important part of the urban landscape in Mesopotamia, and their creation or destruction signified the political independence or subjugation of the city.[234] The razing of Babylon's walls, and hence the end of its independent position, is thus contrasted with the creation of vast new walls at Nineveh. The abundance created by the construction of the canal systems also finds a parallel, in the "abundance" of war booty taken by Sennacherib's troops (line 47). In essence, the cities and their respective construction/destruction become substitutes for one another.[235]

There are other parallels too: Weissert remarks, for example, that the description of the leveling ironically uses terminology typical of building accounts. Likewise, corvée (conscript peasant) laborers and prisoners of war were used to dig Sennacherib's canals,[236] and the foundation inscription from the *bīt akīti* Sennacherib built at Ashur mentions that well-equipped Dilmunite corvée laborers were used to destroy Babylon in a reversal of their usual role as construction workers in Assyria.[237] Sennacherib's

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[232] Marc Van De Mieroop, "A Tale of Two Cities: Nineveh and Babylon," *Iraq* 66 (2004), 1.
[233] Van De Mieroop, "Two Cities", 2.
[234] Smith, 210.
[235] Van De Mieroop, "Two Cities," 5.
[236] J.N. Postgate, "The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, 201.
[237] Weissert, 201, n. 70; the reference can be found in Luckenbill, 138: 42-44.

ingenuity, used in earlier passages as a badge of wise and effective rule, becomes here an inverted vision of what the good king does.[238] It benefits and enhances the Assyrian state in a negative fashion, laying waste to the enemy city as it built and nurtured Nineveh. Creation and destruction are its twin faces, both achieved in the Khinnis inscription through the manipulation of water.

There are also interesting parallels between Sennacherib's presentation of events in the inscription and *Enūma Eliš*. The mace Marduk uses to defeat Tiamat, for example, is called "the rain flood, his mighty weapon."[239] In a list of Marduk's epithets at the end of the poem it is said "without him no one can create ingenious things," and likewise, "in his conflict with Tiamat [he] creates ingenious things, the one with a wide understanding, an intelligent mind."[240] A number of texts created during Sennacherib's reign connected the king's anti-Babylonian position with *Enūma Eliš*, such as the inscription on the bronze gate of the New Year's temple at Ashur (which contained an image of the king helping Aššur in his battle against chaos),[241] and a text which proclaimed Aššur's possession of the "Tablet of Destinies," a powerful object which gives Marduk control of the universe in the Babylonian version.[242] According to Weissert, allusions to the epic were used to provide "theological justification" for Sennacherib's leveling of the city and

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[238] Marc Van De Mieroop, "Revenge, Assyrian Style," *Past and Present* 179 (2003), 8.
[239] Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 38: 49.
[240] Heidel, 58: 112, 116-117.
[241] Weissert, 196.
[242] A.R. George, "Sennacherib and the Tablet of Destinies," *Iraq* 48 (1986), 134.

smashing of its divine images, an act which even the scribes of the Khinnis inscription seem to shrink from attributing to the king (line 48).[243]

The New Year's ceremony, the *Akītu*, had been an annual event in Babylon that reconfirmed Marduk's position as ruler of the universe, at which *Enūma Eliš* was read out loud.[244] Following the destruction of Babylon Sennacherib carried off Marduk's cult statue, and built a *bīt akīti* or New Year's temple at Assur to essentially move the ceremony to Assyria and replace Marduk with Aššur.[245] The intent seems to have been the replacement of Marduk by Aššur in Mesopotamian religious thought, as well as Babylon by Assur.[246] In fact, besides hosting the New Year's festivals, Sennacherib's *bīt akīti* also housed dust from the ruined site of Babylon, a "direct challenge" to the original version of the poem's conceit that Marduk ruled the universe.[247] The message seems clear: Babylon was destroyed, its religious functions were translated to Assur, and now Assyria, not Babylon, was to be the new cultural (as well as political) center of both Mesopotamia and the cosmos as a whole.[248]

If the destruction of the city was a "cosmogonic reversal" designed to blot Babylon out for ever and replace it with Assyria, Sennacherib aimed at nothing less than a second creation, a new world which Aššur ruled utterly, and which Sennacherib had

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[243] Weissert, 196.
[244] Heidel, 17, notes that the public recitation of the poem was believed to protect the city from the spring floods.
[245] Lambert, 77.
[246] Reade, "Waters", 47.
[247] Michalowski, 391.
[248] Machinist, 359.

effected through his doubled activities of ingenious creation and destruction via water.[249] Returning to the Assur stele quoted near the beginning of this chapter, we find a summation of this dual role: "Sennacherib…who builds Assyria, who completes its cult cities, who makes obedient the enemy land, destroyer of their towns, who digs canals."[250]

Logistical Power

In *Impossible Engineering*, Chandra Mukerji distinguishes between two different forms of power, "strategics" and "logistics." Strategics concerns the use of legitimate force to command polities, the effort to "organize human relations" based on hierarchies of domination. Logistics, on the other hand, involve the organization of things, "a form of dominion or regulation of the natural order. Power is exercised over the earth, legitimated by…stewardship, guided by natural knowledge, and realized in a built environment."[251] Its power is not derived from command, but from the arrangement of nature. A canal, for example, after its construction becomes a fact of life in the area in which it is set: its "mute facticity" compels those who live nearby to adapt to its existence.[252] Indeed, the power to produce landscapes is thus the power to shape practices,[253] and it should come as no surprise that the consolidation of the Neo-Assyrian Empire occurred with its first massive irrigation programs overseen by the highest levels of the administration.[254]

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[249] Liverani, "Ideology", 309.
[250] Russell, "Bulls", 535; Luckenbill, 135: 9-11.
[251] Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 214-5.
[252] Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 223.
[253] Smith, 70.
[254] Wilkinson et al., 27.

Massive infrastructure projects allow for rearrangement and ordering, make the state a "more effective place of power for the exercising of political will."[255]

There is also a symbolic dimension to projects of natural engineering, implicit in their sheer size and the level of resources and labor they require to be completed. If anything, such projects manifest a divine or god-like power on the part of the state, a logistical ability akin to the "power of creation itself."[256] For the peoples of Assyria, many of whom were displaced foreigners deported to the imperial core to cultivate the land, the canal system would have been a constant reminder of the might of the Assyrian king and his ability to "remake nature." Indeed, Wilkinson et al. have suggested that the monumental reliefs at places such as Khinnis, Maltaï and Faida may have been positioned near irrigation offtakes, such that every time a local farmer wished to open sluices they would be confronted with royal inscriptions and imagery.[257] Such engineered locales thus become places of power and legitimacy, situated by the civil works that justify king and state.[258]

What is interesting about the Khinnis inscription is the ambivalent, double nature of its rhetoric and the powers it celebrates. It begins with "pietistic-pastoral" titulary, which nevertheless relies on terminology more familiar from militaristic inscriptions than from building accounts. It proceeds through a description of the state of Nineveh before Sennacherib, which emphasizes the people's ignorance of artificial irrigation and the

[255] Mukerji, "Legitimacy", 660.
[256] Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 226.
[257] Wilkinson et al., 32; Ur, 342.
[258] Mukerji, "Legitimacy", 656.

king's heroic ability to bring abundance. Next, the description of the canal systems, running in a similar fashion to a conquest narrative, also emphasizes the king's technical competence and mastery at its most basic level through a description of how the structures were built and their courses, as well as the sheer number of water resources they tapped. The pragmatic benefit of king's ingenuity is revealed in the next section, wherein the city of Nineveh marvelously blooms into artificial agricultural abundance.

The following section forms a kind of pause in the narrative, recounting the clear favor of the gods for Sennacherib's project, who break the sluices in their impatience for Sennacherib's canal to help the Khosr, a river they laid out at the creation. The narrative suddenly shifts to Halule and Babylon, where the other aspect of Sennacherib's ingenious control of water is revealed: as an agent of destruction. As the mirror opposite of the Nineveh passage, the Babylon section features the utter leveling of the city through technical power and control of water. The city is not merely destroyed but blotted out, perhaps to make way for the new creation, the new Mesopotamia, which Sennacherib sought to construct. In this sense the destructive face of power contains within it a regenerative aspect as well.

The technical ingenuity used to effect this change is the leitmotif of the inscription as a whole, and ultimately Sennacherib appears as a skilled monarch able to use logistical power for both creation and destruction, the two "god-like" activities common to all political regimes. The interlacing of peaceful and militaristic rhetoric throughout reminds us that these two faces of power are inseparable. It is the same dichotomy seen in the bull texts of Court VI at Nineveh, where one relates to "military-

territorial superiority on the foreign countries" and the other to "justice and kindness toward the inner subjects."[259] Given the relative peacefulness of Sennacherib's reign, it was perhaps a reminder that technical ingenuity could just as easily be heroic and confrontational as sheer military aggression. Weissert observes that Assyrian kings often "symbolically embodied divine heroes fighting hosts of chaos" in military contexts;[260] given the massive engineering undertaking of Sennacherib's "technical campaigns," it seems likely he would have wished to throw his profile into the same light. As we shall see, this same dichotomy is vitally present in the composition of the Great Relief as well.

[259] Liverani, "Critique", 250.
[260] Weissert, 195.

Chapter 3: Assyrian Relief in Landscape and Palace

The concluding sections of Sennacherib's inscription deal directly with the monuments erected at Khinnis:

> 54. At the mouth of the canal which I had dug through the midst of Mt. Tas 55. I fashioned six great steles with the images of the great gods my lords upon them, and my royal image in the attitude of salutation 56. I set up before them. Every deed of my hands which I had wrought for the good of Nineveh I had engraved thereon. 57. To the kings my sons I left it for the future.[261]
> If ever there is a future prince among the kings, my sons, who 58. destroys the work which I have done (and) breaks the covenant I have (hereby) made with him, diverts the course of the waters of those canals from the plain of Nineveh, 59. may the great gods, all whose names are named in these stelas, by the words of their mouth, 60. a holy decree which cannot fail, curse him with an evil curse, and overthrow his rule.[262]

It is difficult to say which sculptures the "six great steles" refer to. All told, there appear to be seven preserved representations of anthropomorphic deities at Khinnis (five on the Gate Relief and two on the Great Relief), with possibly more on the damaged Rider Relief. In each of these cases the king is certainly present in an "attitude of salutation," a phrase which Ann Shafer translates as "expressions of humility" (*labān appi*).[263] The word *narû* is used for the monuments, a term meaning "inscribed stele" or "memorial monument set up by a king" that was also used to refer to rock reliefs, and it is possible that Sennacherib had the three major sculptures and the three inscribed king niches in mind, the "images of the great gods" referring in the latter case to the divine symbols the

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[261] Jacobsen and Lloyd, 38-9.
[262] Luckenbill, 84-5.
[263] Ann Shafer, "The Carving of an Empire: Neo-Assyrian Monuments on the Periphery" (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 1998), 289.

king's image gestures towards.[264] Shafer also observes that Sennacherib may have carved the inscription earlier on, before all eleven of the king niches had been fashioned, or that the phrase "six great steles" may refer to six pairs of rock reliefs.[265]

This chapter discusses the iconographic and monumental traditions the Great Relief partakes of, and places it within the wider context of Assyrian royal art. Beginning with a discussion of Assyro-Babylonian conceptions of the official royal image, I proceed to examine a series of landscape reliefs, referred to as "peripheral monuments," which contain a number of affinities with the Great Relief. This is followed with an examination of the "emblematic" quality of the Great Relief and how it functions, as well as the characteristics that place this rock sculpture within an old tradition of heraldic, symmetrical imagery. A discussion of one of the best Assyrian examples of this representational tradition, the "sacred tree" present throughout the palace of Aššurnasirpal II, provides a segue into an examination of the decorative scheme of Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival" at Nineveh.

The word rendered as "image" in the translations is *salmu*, which can refer to a representation in any medium. "Royal image" is *salam šarrutiya*, translated more recently as "image of (my) kingship" or "image in my (office of) kingship," a phrase which appears repeatedly in Assyrian monumental inscriptions.[266] The formula pertains to images of the Assyrian monarchs, and refers not just to the king himself but (as the

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[264] *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* N, s.v. *narû* 364-7. See also Ömür Harmanşah, "'Source of the Tigris': Event, Place and Performance in the Assyrian Landscape of the Early Iron Age," *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (2007): 200, n. 12, for a succinct discussion of the term.

[265] Shafer, "Carving," 289.

[266] Irene Winter, "Art *in* Empire: the Royal Image and the Visual Dimensions of Assyrian Ideology," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East, 1: Of the First Millenium BCE* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 78.

translation implies) also to the notion of kingship that the monarch embodies.[267] In investigating the images the Assyrians created of their monarchs, Irene Winter has argued that the *salam šarrutiya* functions as a portrait of monarchy itself, portraying not individual but royal physiognomy, the idealized traits which the king was believed to possess as a divinely sanctioned ruler.[268] In such a representation, the king's body was "coded" with certain attributes that signified his strength (a well-muscled arm), his virility (a long, luxurious beard) and so forth, all crucial to the successful functioning of his rule.[269] The *salam šarrutiya* is thus an official image in the truest sense of the phrase, in which the king's likeness is not a portrait of his person but of his office.[270]

There is also evidence that the Assyrian kings were personally involved in the creation of their *salam šarrutiya*. Letters to Esarhaddon from various officials imply that the king actively chose which images of him were to be used for monuments, picking from several possible options presented to him.[271] The king thus "exercised visual control over his own image" and directly determined how he would be represented, an important element to keep in mind when considering the Khinnis reliefs.[272] The Great Relief is quite unusual when compared to the repertoire of Assyrian royal art, and does not easily fit into the categories that modern scholars have created for the art of the empire. It is important therefore to remember both the official nature of the image, as a representation

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[267] Shafer, "Carving," 51.
[268] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 84.
[269] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 85.
[270] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 91.
[271] See Stephen W. Cole and Peter Machinist, *Letters from Priests to the Kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal* (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1998), 36-7.
[272] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 81.

of kingship, and the active agency of the king in constructing his *salam šarrutiya*, especially one such as Sennacherib who, as we have seen in his inscriptions, placed such high value in representing himself as an innovator involved in building projects. Indeed, as the phrase "image of *my* kingship" implies, the *salam šarrutiya* was a very deliberate self-representation.

Sculptural Context: The Peripheral Monuments

The Great Relief seems at first glance to fall into a group of sculptures called "periphery monuments" by Ann Shafer. In her important study of these sculptures, Shafer defines the periphery monument as either a free-standing stele or rock relief carved on the borders of the Assyrian empire by kings while on campaign, serving to delineate Assyrian political presence and territorial acquisition in distant landscapes. Referred to explicitly as *salam šarrutiya*, the classic periphery monument contains a profile view of the king in full regalia, gesturing towards a group of divine symbols with pointed index figure, and inscribed with an account of the campaign or expedition during which the image was carved, concluding with a series of curses against those who would destroy or deface the image or inscription.[273] The pointing finger, in particular, was referred to as *ubana tarasu* ("stretching-the-finger"), which can be understood as a pious "gesture of speech" establishing direct contact between the king and the gods.[274] The king niches at Khinnis, in fact, present an excellent example of the visual characteristics that Shafer enumerates: profile view, full royal dress and crown, and finger pointed towards divine

[273] Shafer, "Carving," 1-2.
[274] Harmanşah, 187.

symbols. These monuments "consistently marked important culminating or transitional points in the campaigns," and corresponded to what were considered the most important peripheral regions of the empire.[275] In this political context, Shafer has observed that these monuments serve to signify the king's relationship with the empire's territorial growth, marking expanding borders and the king's movement around the realm.[276] The king, through his image, is thus made the foremost agent of Assyrian imperial expansion.[277]

It is important to note that these peripheral monuments were often carved at "symbolically-charged" places, such as mountain passes, springs, or river sources, spaces important to the strategic, economic or religious functioning of the Assyrian state.[278] Indeed, it seems that monuments carved in these spaces were associated with the protection of the land and its resources for Assyrian use.[279] The most famous of these is a monument erected at the "source of the Tigris," or Tigris Tunnel, a cave through which the upper Tigris river flows in southeastern Turkey. Here, at the place the Assyrians believed the Tigris originated, Shalmaneser III (r. 858-824 BCE) carved two successive *salam šarrutiya* in two sections of the cave. A visual representation of these activities has in fact survived, in the bronze bands of the Balawat gates, excavated from the site of the same name and dating to Shalmaneser's reign. The gate bands portray workmen carving

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[275] Ann Shafer, "Assyrian Royal Monuments on the Periphery: Ritual and the Making of Imperial Space," in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context: Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter by her Students*, ed. Marian Feldman and Jack Chang (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 136.
[276] Shafer, "Monuments," 140.
[277] Shafer, "Monuments," 136.
[278] Harmanşah, 190.
[279] Shafer, "Monuments," 141.

into the walls of the Tigris Tunnel (fig. 21), as well as a subsequent scene depicting a ritual procession to the reliefs, an event mentioned in Shalmaneser's palace inscriptions.[280]

Shafer observes that these descriptions of ritual associated with periphery monuments are limited to the reigns of Shalmaneser III and his predecessor Aššurnasirpal II, and in fact that such treatment seems to have been restricted to sites associated with important topographical features like river sources and waterways. The intensified ritual activity surrounding periphery monuments placed at such spots may have been related to the king's concern with controlling natural resources for the Assyrian state. Shafer also notes that by placing his *salam šarrutiya* at the gushing, difficult-to-reach source of the waters the king associated himself with the source of Assyrian abundance and prosperity, as well as symbolizing his heroic ability to "acquire and rechannel" both natural and human resources for the benefit of Assyria.[281] Indeed, as Shafer observes, the location of the Great Relief at Khinnis at the source of a major canal harks back to the river-source monuments of these ninth century kings.[282]

"Portraits of leaders signify power in the Middle East," and in fact there may have been a real ontological potency behind the *salam šarrutiya* beyond their political connotations.[283] As Winter observes, the body of the king in these "images of my kingship" are coded with the conventional attributes of the ideal monarch. Zainab

[280] Shafer, "Carving," 92-3.
[281] Shafer, "Carving," 96-7.
[282] Shafer, "Carving," 289.
[283] Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: the Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 110.

Bahrani, building on Winter's work and a detailed study of the cuneiform writing system, has argued in fact that the king's *salmu* is not a mere representation of the monarch but a repetition. In the same manner that a cuneiform sign may refer to multiple referents through multiple means (pictographic similarity, homophony, etc.), the nexus of referents to the king in a *salmu* serve to summon his presence and effectively bring his veritably real double into existence. In Bahrani's reading, therefore, "his infinite power is established through the circulation of the multiplicity of names, images, monuments, and histories. Each part works towards an incessant presence."[284] In the case of peripheral monuments, the *salam šarrutiya* brought the king's simulacrum into distant landscapes on the borders of the empire, replicating his person across geographic space and expanding his being into important and symbolically powerful natural sites such as springs and mountains. The landscape *salmu* worked to distribute the king's agency into these landscapes,[285] as well as perpetually reconstituting the state's borders that the king represented (or doubled) had militarily defined in the first place.[286]

As noted above the eleven king niches correspond most closely to the traditional peripheral monument formula among the reliefs at Khinnis, and in Shafer's catalogue of peripheral monuments she focuses on these rather than the more unusual features of the site. Shafer observes, however, that Sennacherib made important changes to the manner in which these monuments were carved and situated, expanding their function.[287] One

[284] Bahrani, 143-4.
[285] Harmanşah, 181.
[286] Shafer, "Monuments," 147.
[287] Shafer, "Monuments," 135.

innovation is apparent in the sheer number of these smaller *salam šarrutiya* present at Khinnis: Sennacherib seems to have proliferated the number of monuments to delineate a smaller site. Rather than a single relief marking a topographical feature, or marking the periphery of the empire, multiple monuments create a boundary for an important space.[288] At Khinnis, the king niches dotting the cliff face above the Great Relief conceptually ring and rein in the site, and as noted above appear to watch over the entrance, middle, and end of the gorge in which the river was canalized. There is an unusual *salmu* of the peripheral monument type marking the end of a small channel that drained into the Khinnis site, at nearby Shiru Maliktha (fig. 22). It may have been one of a number of such reliefs at the extremities of branches flowing towards Khinnis, leading Shafer to speculate that "Sennacherib's canal system may have functioned conceptually as a microcosmic parallel to the Assyrian empire as a whole, with peripheral monuments carefully marking each extremity, much in the same way they usually delineated the realm."[289]

Secondly, Shafer also points out the novelty in *what* Sennacherib commemorated with these reliefs, namely the king's numerous civil works projects as opposed to military victories or territorial expansion. Besides Khinnis, for example, Sennacherib also constructed a large roadway through Nineveh during his reconstruction of the city, and carved steles to mark the width of the new thoroughfare (fig. 23). These are unusual in the shrunken size of the king's *salmu*, and the appearance of text within the pictorial field

[288] Shafer, "Carving," 41.
[289] Shafer, "Carving," 44.

at the top of the monument. They are essentially mirror images of one another, and stood "facing each other." Like the inscription at Khinnis, they are primarily concerned with the work commemorated, and indicate that Sennacherib carved them to delineate the proper width of his road. Both these reliefs and the inscribed king niches at Khinnis appear to serve as "indexical markers toward the king's civil works," confirmed by the fact that the curses present in the text are explicitly directed against those who would destroy the civic work as opposed to the monument itself, a feature present in the Khinnis inscription as well.[290]

Shafer does including the Great and Gate Reliefs in her catalogue of periphery monuments because "they do not appear to have functioned in quite the same manner as the eleven smaller reliefs."[291] Indeed, these larger representational objects do not seem to delineate a boundary as the king niches do. Rather, they are situated at the functional heart of the site, associated with what would have been the very mechanism that channeled water into Sennacherib's new canal. Moreover, the imagery used is unprecedented in Assyrian landscape relief, relatable only to the large reliefs carved at the sites of Maltaï and Faida that were associated with water sources for Sennacherib's Northern canal system.[292] Shafer has written elsewhere that an important aspect of the peripheral monuments is the manner in which they "embody and affirm the royal prerogative to make established iconographies into new images."[293] Indeed, texts from all

[290] Shafer, "Carving," 290-3.
[291] Shafer, "Carving," 44 n. 105.
[292] Shafer, "Carving," 288 n. 66.
[293] Shafer, "Monuments," 138.

phases of ancient Near Eastern history emphasize that artistic creation originates with the king, and as the Khinnis inscription attests, the Neo-Assyrian texts directly state that the king "created" images of the gods and himself.[294]

In fact, Shafer argues that an integral aspect of the functioning of the periphery monuments was the manner in which the manipulation of iconographies –the divine symbols, the body of the ruler coded for the traits of kingship, and so forth– in itself embodied the king's right to control his image and the conditions of its viewing.[295] In this sense, the especially unusual and deliberate iconographic manipulation present in the Great Relief merits careful study, as does its controlled setting and context in the landscape. An understanding of these novel aspects of Khinnis can impart a more nuanced understanding of the ideological message about Assyrian monarchy that Sennacherib wished to be conveyed. The king's prerogative to reconfigure older iconographies for his monuments, I would argue, parallels his "royal prerogative to reconfigure the land itself" in his canal-building program.[296]

Before examining this iconography, however, it is important to first evaluate some of the broader means by which the Great Relief functions. One of the first traits of this image that immediately differentiate it from Shafer's periphery monuments is its huge size. In his study of Sennacherib's "Palace without Rival" at Nineveh, John Russell has noted that the small apotropaic figurines of mythological entities the Assyrian kings buried under sensitive junctures within their palaces are in Sennacherib's case transferred

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[294] Jennifer C. Ross, "Representations, Reality, and Ideology," in *Archaeologies of the Middle East: Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 331.
[295] Shafer, "Carving," 66.
[296] Shafer, "Carving," 44.

to wall reliefs (fig. 24). Normally buried under doorways, these figures had instead been carved by Sennacherib's sculptors on the sides of entrances, "newly applied in a new context."[297] Their protective qualities had been transferred to a new and monumental scale, and Russell observes that this "innovation may or may not have been more efficacious where incorporeal visitors were concerned, but it certainly would have provided an impressive effect for corporeal ones."[298] The "gigantism" Russell finds in Sennacherib's palace reliefs is echoed in the large sculptures the king carved to mark and commemorate his aqueducts. Indeed, in a vast open landscape, monumental size becomes even more pressing, a means of "subverting" the natural environment to the needs of the monument.[299]

One iconographic element that the Great Relief *does* appear to carry over from the peripheral monuments is the profile figure of the king. Here too the king appears to interact with the divine, though in this case the king holds a small curious oval object rather than engaging in the finger-pointing gesture. The divine is signified not through symbols, but in full-blown (and attention-grabbing) anthropomorphic depictions of Aššur and Mullissu. These two gods face one another, inward, while the profile of the king is duplicated on either side of the deities, in close proximity to each. The duplicated image of the king allows this proximity to be established simultaneously, by the same monarch, as there is no visible distinction between the two royal figures. In contrast to the gods,

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[297] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 186.
[298] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 186-7.
[299] Nassos Papalexandrou, "Constructed Landscapes: Visual Cultures of Violent Contact," *Stanford Journal of Archaeology* 5 (2007): 166.

who are individualized by their gender, attributes, animals and gestures, the kings are mirror images.

The arrangement of figures on the Great Relief is one of intense (but not perfect) symmetry. All four figures are arranged to either side of an axial line between the two gods, each side containing a deity and king. While the use of symmetry as a compositional device may seem unremarkable, it is nevertheless an important and conscious choice on the part of the designer. Symmetry works to anchor the image in the perception of the viewer on a "physiological/psychological level," and prevents the movement of the eye from the symmetrical image. It promotes "the absorption of the whole at once" as a single, sudden visual moment that attracts the gaze of the viewer.[300] Indeed, in the Great Relief all figures look inward- there is no visual "path" out of the monument, and the eye is continuously drawn back into the grouping of the figures. Moreover, the orderly layout of symmetrical compositions allows for greater visual legibility for the viewer, and easier comprehension of whatever meaning or message may be contained therein.[301] Symmetry also imparted a cosmic dimension to the represented, "a concept of world order peculiar to Assyrian thought."[302] As a principle, it simulated "the stability (balance) of the eternal order reflected through the proper exercise of

[300] Irene Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East, 1: Of the First Millenium BCE*, 10.
[301] Mehmet-Ali Ataç, "Visual Formula and Meaning in Neo-Assyrian Relief Sculpture," *Art Bulletin* 88 (2006): 79.
[302] Pauline Albenda, "Symmetry in the Art of the Assyrian Empire," in *La circulation des biens, des personnes et des idées dans le Proche-Orient ancien; actes de la XXXVIIIe Rencontre assyriologique internationale*, ed. by Dominique Charpin and Francis Joannès (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilizations, 1992), 297.

kingship."[303] As we shall see, it could also serve to mark loci of interaction between the monarch and this divine power.

The Emblem

The great palatial narrative relief programs are the best known and most admired examples of Assyrian art, yet as the Great Relief indicates the Assyrians also were quite comfortable working in a non-narrative idiom. Commemorative rather than narrative, the Great Relief represents a moment that cannot be ascribed to any place or time, and is thus eternal, an image "frozen in cosmic time."[304] In other words it is *emblematic*, an ordered image whose standardized quality removes it from "the ordinary realm of pictorial representation, placing [it] in a timeless rhetoric of hieratic or cosmic character."[305] In contrast to spatially-oriented narrative, which flows in a direction the eye must follow to unfold meaning, the emblematic packs meaning in "connotative layers" at a single point.[306] Indeed, the symmetry of the Great Relief coerces the eye to remain on this emblem, ensuring that these layers of meaning are parsed out by the viewer.

The emblem as a strategy of conveying meaning has a long history, and in both Mesopotamia and Egypt emblematic visual representations begin to appear on art objects far earlier than mature writing.[307] In Assyrian times at least, emblematic or heraldic representation seems to have been associated especially with temples and mythological

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[303] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10.
[304] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 78.
[305] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 69.
[306] Holly Pittman, "The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria," *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996): 53.
[307] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 69.

subjects (perhaps naturally, as such subjects are "beyond time" indeed), in contexts that deal not with the biography or personal propaganda of the ruler but with the ideology of the state itself.[308] Egyptian art provides a superb example of this kind of direct, potent political symbolism in the *sema tawy*, the image which signified the political and ideological union of the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt (fig. 25). Here two symmetrically-arranged figures, the gods Horus and Seth, pull on the two heraldic plants of north and south (papyrus and reed) around a stylized wind-pipe and pair of lungs, a hieroglyph which signified "lungs" but which was also a homophone of the verb "to unite."[309]

Mehmet-Ali Ataç has studied the appearance of "formulaic representation" in the palace reliefs of Aššurnasirpal II and other Assyrian monarchs, emblematic scenes generally focused on the person of the king and his associates, which can appear either in single compositions such as the Great Relief or embedded in wider historical or narrative sequences.[310] By and large, such formulae seem to articulate dualities, "complimentary opposites," and the reconciliation of these opposites in "chiastic compositions" set within a cosmological framework.[311] This can be demonstrated, for example, in the "encounter" scenes in which the Assyrian king is depicted face-to-face with an official wearing a headband, appearing in various iterations throughout the palace (fig. 26). The Egyptian

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[308] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 31.

[309] Barry Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1989), 27-8; Mehmet-Ali Ataç points out that Mesopotamia had its own form of geographic political symmetry, in the Ur-III period royal title "King of Sumer and Akkad," which by Neo-Assyrian times seems to have been reinterpreted as the duality of Babylon and Assyria; see Ataç, "Visual Formula," 69, 78.

[310] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 69.

[311] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 84; Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 116.

sema tawy formula, with its two gods face-to-face representing the unification of different geopolitical aspects of idealized Egyptian kingship, may suggest as well that these chiastic compositions in Assyrian art function to present the "conceptual components of a unified Assyrian kingship."[312] Based on the accoutrements held by these figures and the multiple configurations in which they appear, Ataç interprets the headband-wearing prince and the king as the confrontation of the *sacerdotium* and *regnum* of Assyrian kingship, the cultic and secular faces of royal power.[313]

Alongside the chiastic "encounter" formula, Ataç also analyzes another kind of hieratic composition, which he refers to as "bilateral complimentarity." In this formula, two opposing figures essentially mirror each other, the same figure turned 180 degrees from one side to the other. As an example, Ataç proposes the throne base of Shalmaneser III (fig. 27), in which the kings of Babylon (on the left) and Assyria (on the right) are shown meeting and shaking hands, after the latter suppressed a revolt against the Babylonian king and confirmed his position as ruler. As Ataç points out these figures are essentially identical, save for their headdresses, and without these sartorial details they could be different views of the same personage. This mirrored dichotomy, which Ataç stresses is subservient to the chiastic dualities discussed above, likewise creates a visual equality that can be regarded as emblematic or hieratic.[314]

Both of these emblematic principles articulated by Ataç seem to be at work within the Great Relief at Khinnis as well. The meeting of Aššur and Mullissu at the center of

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[312] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 75.
[313] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 71-8; Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 92.
[314] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 90.

the composition follows the chiastic "encounter," with each figure carrying different objects, having different hand gestures, and standing on top of different animal familiars. The fact that they are male and female is important as well, and their roles as husband and wife conceptually adds to the interpretation of these figures as complimentary opposites. The meeting of these two deities is attended by the mirrored profiles of the king, duplicated on both sides holding the same objects and dressed in the same garments. These figures can also be thought of in terms of the "bilateral complimentarity" which Ataç describes, though in this case the only elements which seem to differentiate Sennacherib's duplicates are the deities which each figure attends on.

The Great Relief thus falls into a very old tradition of emblematic representation, following as it does many of the conventions isolated by Ataç. These alert the viewer that what they are gazing upon is an event beyond space and time, one in which apparent opposites engage in a chiastic conciliation. This focal encounter is framed in turn by the figures of Sennacherib, duplicated in a bilateral fashion to attend upon the central meeting. At this juncture a focused examination of another, specific, emblematic Assyrian composition can deepen our understanding of the principles at work within the Great Relief, and it is to this we now turn.

The Sacred Tree

As mentioned above, the largest concentration of these formulaic compositions seem to be in the reliefs of Aššurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud, and Ataç argues that the walls of this structure were thus densely woven with emblematic

representations of "different facets of kingship."[315] One of the best known of these, and the emblem which the Great Relief most closely resembles, is the so-called "sacred tree" located in the throneroom (fig. 28). There are a number of compositional similarities between the sacred tree and the Great Relief, and a discussion of the former will help illuminate how the latter functions emblematically, as well as illustrate several ideological themes which seem to be reiterated within the Great Relief. Like the Great Relief, the central focus is on a pair of duplicated kings flanking a central ensemble. Altogether the image contains four figures, two kings and two *apkallus* with what appear to be implements of fertilization, ranged on either side of a curious vegetal object that forms the composition's axis of symmetry and focus. This object consists of a straight central trunk, terminated by a large palmette, ringed with smaller palmettes strung together with vines, forming an oblong shape with a rounded top. Above this is a winged disc containing a divine personage who gestures toward the king on the left, generally identified as the god Aššur.[316]

The composition actually appears twice within the throneroom (fig. 29), placed opposite the main central entrance (slab B13) and directly behind the king's throne at the east end of the hall (B23). These sacred tree images thus form the "pivot points" of the throneroom's program, "orienting the viewer immediately upon entrance, and reorienting him as he turns ninety degrees to face the king on his throne and the identical relief

[315] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 82.
[316] Irene J. Winter, "The Program of the Throneroom of Assurnasirpal II," in *Essays in Near Eastern Art and Archaeology in Honor of Charles Kyrle Wilkinson*, ed. by Prudence O. Harper and Holly Pittman (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 16.

above."[317] Irene Winter argues that the fact that these reliefs are not split into two registers, as the rest of the throneroom program is, and that they are somewhat raised above the level of the floor, indicates the importance attached to the viewer seeing and digesting their content.[318] Likewise, the static qualities of symmetry discussed above would have worked to ensure that the eye would be naturally drawn to these emblems amongst the tumult of the surrounding narrative images. The eye is encouraged to rest on them, first upon entering and then upon the king himself, the ultimate focus of the throneroom program and hence conceptually associated with the sacred tree emblem.

As the sacred tree composition was situated on slab B23 behind the throne, a viewer looking towards the king would have seen him engulfed in the image, his throne sitting directly before the tree, thus incorporating his physical body into the emblem itself. The king becomes a hieratic figure, flanked by kings and *apkallus*, with the god Aššur over his head. The placement of slab B23 also emphasizes the close connection between the king and the sacred tree, placed directly behind his throne.[319] This connection highlights the fact that that the sacred tree emblem serves above all as a political and theological statement about the nature of Assyrian monarchy.[320] It is, in the words of Anton Moortgat, "a political and religious idea [rendered] as a heraldic abstraction divorced from time and space."[321]

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[317] Winter, "Program," 17.
[318] Winter, "Program," 17.
[319] Barbara Nevling Porter, "Sacred Trees, Date Palms, and the Royal Persona of Ashurnasirpal II," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 52 (1993): 132.
[320] Winter, "Program," 16.
[321] Quoted in Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 10.

The sacred tree as an emblem has generated an enormous quantity of scholarly study and debate, a full rehearsal of which is beyond the scope of this thesis.[322] Even a cursory examination of the image, however, will indicate that two processes seem to be occurring. First, the two king figures point (a gesture of communication and reverence) towards both the winged disc of Aššur above and the sacred tree itself. Second, the two *apkallu* figures appear to be sprinkling or pollinating the king with pinecone-like objects while holding buckets. Barbara Nevling Porter, following arguments first made by Edward Tylor in the late nineteenth century, regards the sacred tree as a stylized date palm, based on the clear palmette crowning and the smaller palmettes surrounding the trunk. Furthermore, the process of pollination for cultivated date palms involves both shaking oval-shaped male flower clusters over female flowers and sprinkling water on the flowers afterwards to ensure the pollen is not blown away, providing a plausible explanation for the use of cone and bucket in the reliefs. The date palm was often referred to in Akkadian as "tree of abundance" or "tree of riches," and would have served as an excellent symbol for abundance or fertility.[323]

It also should be noted that the sacred tree was associated with both Ea and Ishtar, fertility gods *par excellance*, further strengthening the association of this object with abundance.[324] And indeed Edith Porada suggested that the stylized curlicues and waving lines represented watercourses.[325] Ultimately, it seems uncontestable that the composition

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[322] See Mariana Giovino, *The Assyrian Sacred Tree: A History of Interpretations* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2007).
[323] Porter, "Sacred Trees," 133-4.
[324] Ataç, "Formula," 86; Porter, "Sacred Trees," 138.
[325] Winter, "Rhetoric of Abundance," 165.

as a whole is an "emblem of the provisioning of the land and the king's relationship to it."[326] The sacred tree may also be thought of as a representation of the land of Assyria itself and its potential for growth, both agricultural and territorial, in relation to divine favor.[327] Furthermore, the arrangement of the figures suggests the king's primacy as the terrestrial agent of this divine abundance, as the *apkallus* appear to fertilize the king himself as well as the sacred tree.[328] A glazed-brick panel from Nimrud, constructed in the time of Shalmaneser III, provides another emblematic composition in which the relationship between the king and the sacred tree is stressed, and here two duplicate king figures are subsumed into the oblong form of the tree itself. The tree in fact assumes pride of place, above both the kings and a disc of Aššur (fig. 30).[329]

Irene Winter interprets the sacred tree composition as a reflection of the phrase "keeper of the gods" in Aššurnasirpal's titulary contained in the palace inscriptions, and the positioning of the figures also suggests this divine contact between king and gods.[330] The "stretching-the-finger" gesture is repeated twice by the king figures, towards Aššur in his winged disc and towards the tree. Ataç argues this is a chiastic formula bringing together complimentary opposites, communicated in the gestures, the garments, and the positioning of the kings. The figure on the left touches the sacred tree with his mace and points towards it, thus establishing conceptual contact. The figure on the right holds his mace apart from the tree, and points instead towards Aššur, who likewise gestures

[326] Irene J. Winter, quoted in Porter, "Sacred Trees," 133.
[327] Shafer, "Carving," 69; Winter, "Program," 16.
[328] Shafer, "Monuments," 139.
[329] See Julian Reade, "A Glazed Brick-Panel from Nimrud," *Iraq* 25 (1963): 38-47.
[330] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 75.

towards him. Ataç associates the former king with the esoteric, the subterranean netherworld, and *gnosis*, the latter with the exoteric, the celestial, and royal authority: in other words, the *sacerdotium* and *regnum* which Ataç argues to be the fundamental ideological duality articulated throughout Aššurnasirpal's relief program. It would seem these are not so much two different images of the king, but rather "two different images of *kingship*."[331]

The sacred tree is by no means limited to the throneroom; abbreviated sacred tree scenes with *apkallus* or vulture-headed genii flanking the tree are endlessly reiterated across the walls of many other rooms of the palace, a repetition that again serves to emphasize that this emblem belongs "to an abstract realm of ideal intentions" (fig. 31).[332] Interestingly, Aššurnasirpal's palace features one primary text, the "Standard Inscription," which is carved over every slab of the structure, repeated as endlessly as the sacred tree compositions. The text identifies the palace as the creation of the king, followed by an extensive titulary invoking the gods, and proceeds through an annalistic account of king's reign.[333] The truncated sacred tree emblem may therefore be seen as the "paradigm" or "abbreviation that stands for the whole in the total decorative scheme of the palace– much as the Standard Inscription is repeated over every slab. It is the kernel of the message, elaborated most fully in the throneroom into a complex statement."[334] Moreover these emblems can be seen, as Winter argues, as "the résume of the essence of

[331] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 84-6.
[332] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 21.
[333] Paley, 125-133.
[334] Winter, "Program," 26.

the Standard Inscription: the articulation of the right order of the universe."[335] The "connotative layers" characteristic of the emblem allow for this summation of complex ideas and themes contained within inscriptions or narrative art into a single, self-sufficient composition.

Shafer observes that the sacred tree image seems to have had direct iconographic connections with the *salmu* of the peripheral monuments. Because of its positioning within the throneroom, the monarch would have sat upon his throne directly before the sacred tree itself, his person thus framed by the abstract outline made by the tree's shape: an oblong niche with a rounded top. Shafer points out that the peripheral monuments use this same shape to frame the *salam šarrutiya* contained within, evoking the abstract outline of the sacred tree and referring back to the arrangement of the king physically seated (and hence outlined or framed) before the sacred tree within the palace.[336] The glazed brick panel of Shalmaneser III suggests another manner in which the king's *salmu* could be housed within the sacred tree's characteristic outline, which forms a frame for the emblem as a whole.[337] Another representational connection lies in the very use of the king's profile. Of the surviving peripheral monuments, roughly half portray the king facing right, and half facing left, a choice that seems to reference the placement of figures on slab B23. That this emblem served as a source may demonstrated by Sennacherib's road stelae from Nineveh, wherein right and left profiles of the king mark separate monuments standing on either side of the roadway commemorated. The kings on the

[335] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 24.
[336] Shafer, "Carving," 77.
[337] Shafer, "Carving," 75.

stelae, as with the Great Relief and slab B23, are configured such that they turn inward towards the focus of the monuments' function.[338]

Shafer suggests that the reduplicated figures of the king and the *apkallu* may also indicate movement rotating around the axis of the sacred tree. If the sacred tree is a representation of the land of Assyria and its divinely bestowed abundance, then the rotation of the king from one side of the tree to the other might be thought of as movement around the kingdom, and the shifting left-right profiles of the peripheral monuments as an emblematic means of conveying the king's movements across the realm.[339] Shafer argues further that just as the sacred tree emblem directs movement through and delineates the boundaries of the palace, so do peripheral monuments in the landscape mark the boundaries and expansion of the Assyrian state. The monuments, using the outline of the sacred tree as a framing device, "stood metaphorically like royal trees throughout the landscape, functioning like the outer palmettes on the stylized tree, each representing a new shoot of territorial growth on the periphery."[340] These monuments thus evince a concern and reverence for "a larger process," the building or "vegetal growth" of the Assyrian Empire through successive reigns.[341]

It is also important to consider the fact that these monuments seem to spread an emblematic iconography into the most remote borderlands of the Empire from a source at the very heart of the palace. Considering the association of the shape of the sacred tree

[338] Shafer, "Carving," 70.
[339] Shafer, "Carving," 71.
[340] Shafer, "Carving," 79.
[341] Shafer, "Carving," 112, 106.

with the frames of the peripheral monuments, these objects may even be thought of as emblems of an emblem, in the same manner that Winter describes the use of the sacred tree as a summary of the palace inscriptions: the king is reduced to a single profile, divine presence is signified by symbols rather than a winged disc, and the shape of the tree itself forms the framing niche of the image. The spread of monumental imagery in an even more layered and emblematic format thus follows the Assyrian discourse of imperialism, "which conceives itself precisely as an expansion of landscape, of the center into the hinterland."[342] Shafer in fact sees this process reflected in the Khinnis inscription, which, through its annalistic organization and concern with the works commemorated rather than the monument itself, seems to be text taken directly from a palatial context.[343] Indeed, considering the placement of the king's throne in front of the sacred tree, the king sitting in state before the emblem becomes the conceptual "shoot" or "root" from which the spreading branches of Assyrian expansion derive.

While sacred tree emblems are reiterated throughout Aššurnasirpal's program, it is the throneroom which is "loaded with in a condensed manner with the some of the most fundamental elements that constitute the visual language of the Northwest Palace."[344] As the space functionally devoted to the presentation of the monarch it is the locus of ideology, an "integrated architectural, pictorial, and textual representation of the

[342] Michelle I. Marcus, "Geography as Visual Ideology: Landscape, Knowledge, and Power in Neo-Assyrian Art," in *Neo-Assyrian Geography*, ed. by Mario Liverani (Rome: Università di Roma, Dipartimento di scienze storiche, archeologiche e antropologiche dell' Antichità, 1995), 195.
[343] Shafer, "Carving," 106 n. 93.
[344] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 75.

institution of kingship and the ideal of the Neo-Assyrian state."[345] The emphasis on the *institution* of kingship is an especially salient point, for the throneroom program is more than mere personal propaganda; it speaks for "the state as a whole."[346] Winter argues, for example, that the narrative reliefs included in the Northwest Palace serve to turn the throneroom into a microcosm of the Assyrian state, with narrative relief sequences depicting military campaigns distributed according to geographic considerations. Campaigns in the Zagros are hence depicted on the east wall, western campaigns on the west wall, and so forth, thus articulating the boundaries of the empire.[347] Moreover, Winter argues further that the titulary included in Aššurnasirpal's Standard Inscription can be traced thematically in the progression of reliefs in the throneroom program, beginning with the enthroned king ("I am Aššurnasirpal"), the sacred tree ("Vice-Regent of Aššur"), and then through lion hunts and military engagements, visually paralleling the attributes given to the king.[348] Even the narrative reliefs become co-opted, in a sense, into the larger emblematic configuration of the throneroom itself, the ultimate message of which is a statement about the nature and maintenance of the state through military and cultic measures.[349]

It is worthwhile to pause here briefly and attempt to draw together some of the threads of argument discussed above, as the sacred tree emblem contains important insights for an examination of the Great Relief. The king's doubled profile in the Great

[345] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 32.
[346] Winter, "Program," 28.
[347] Winter, "Program," 24.
[348] Winter, "Program," 27.
[349] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 28.

Relief, for example, seems to indicate that the image relates to ideological conceptions about the cosmic foundations of Assyrian kingship, and might serve as a direct reference to the sacred tree emblem itself. Moreover, the dualism which Ataç discusses in connection with the king figures on either side of the sacred tree suggests that another form of duality was operating within the Great Relief, with each royal figure attached to different facets of ideal monarchy. The placement of the sacred tree emblem within the palace has implications for the Great Relief as well. It establishes the function of the throneroom as a locus of relief imagery concerned with the ideological basis of Assyrian kingship, a visual "summation" of the state's monarchical rhetoric. It also points to the connection between imagery contained within the throneroom and monuments constructed on the periphery, and the tendency to expand these emblems from the very heart of Assyrian power to its furthest extremities. All of this suggests that an examination of the palace which Sennacherib himself built in his new capital at Nineveh will provide further insight into the Great Relief, and it is to this structure that we turn next.

Sculptural Context: The "Palace Without Rival"

The sacred tree emblem seems to disappear from palatial relief decoration after the reigns of Aššurnasirpal II and his immediate successors, such that it is essentially absent by Sennacherib's time.[350] Yet dense emblematicism of this period of Assyrian art, however, never completely disappears, and the narrative subjects that come to dominate later palatial decorations can provide further nuance to our understanding of the Great

[350] Porter, "Sacred Trees," 139.

Relief. It should be mentioned at the outset that, as the complex layout of Aššurnasirpal's throneroom indicates, the narrative programs of the Assyrian kings were highly deliberate productions, planned and carried out under the direction of both the king and a body of scholarly experts.[351]

There appears to be, moreover, a correlation between the appearance and development of the narrative relief programs and the historical development of the Empire.[352] Winter observes that historical narrative first appears with the founding of a new imperial capital at Kalhu (Nimrud) by Aššurnasirpal II, after the kings had resided for a thousand years at the cult center of Assur. The Northwest Palace relief program "may therefore be seen as a response to the imperial situation and imperial needs."[353] The mythological or cultic formulae which appear in Aššurnasirpal's palace alongside these historical narratives must be seen as a function of the intended audience, which (taking the sacred tree compositions into consideration) would have to have been a highly-informed one, receptive to the layered cultic meanings embedded in emblematic representations that highlighted the monarch's function as an agent of fertility and state growth.[354]

As the empire expanded, however, the population of the state became increasingly heterogeneous, especially as Assyrian policy involved the deportation and resettlement of conquered populations in underdeveloped regions of the heartland. Likewise, the

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[351] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 4.
[352] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 45.
[353] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 25.
[354] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 39.

increasing imperial profile of Assyria necessitated contact with an ever-widening array of foreign powers and tributary states, and the letters and inscriptions of the Assyrian kings attest to their full expectation that envoys and diplomatic personnel would be in attendance at the palaces for major events.[355] In other words, the new cosmopolitanism of the state meant that the possible audience for the palace reliefs likewise became increasingly heterogeneous, and hence legibility was to become a primary concern of the later programs. Thus historical narrative, representations of events known (or claimed) to have happened in real time and space, assumed a larger profile in decoration schemes. The decrease in cultic emblematicism "represents a lowering common denominator of what would be intelligible to a heterogeneous audience."[356] Even in Aššurnasirpal's palace, the most emblematic of the palatial programs, it appears that historical narrative is primarily concentrated in areas such as the throneroom where it would likely be seen by those unreceptive to the sacred tree behind the throne and repeated endlessly elsewhere.

The subject of these later reliefs would thus seem to be *events* rather than "mere maintenance" of the Assyrian realm.[357] Yet as Winter points out, the legibility and matter-of-factness of historical narrative can serve as much of an ideological or propagandistic function as emblems. The "objectivity" of the events depicted, the

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[355] The desire to impress visitors is implicit in palace texts such as Aššurnasirpal's Standard Inscription, which recounts the costly materials and furnishings used to create his residence; see Paley, 132-3. Nor should such uses of imperial architecture be though of as "childish" or "primitive;" one need only recall Adolf Hitler's new Reich Chancellery, explicitly designed to intimidate diplomats using enormous, endless marble hallways terminating at Hitler's giant desk, for a modern example which emphasizes how deadly serious such ostentation could be. See Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 122-4.

[356] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 42.

[357] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 45.

elements that place them in time and space, serve to equate the portrayed sequence or meaning of the events with objective truth.[358] Subject matter can also work on this level, such that military reliefs not only portray a battle the king fought, but also proclaim an ever-present threat that reinforces the need for a powerful monarch. With increasing social complexity, affiliations must be "forged through shared needs" such as external violent threats.[359] Both of these examples serve to underscore the manner in which even the readability and seeming objectivity of the narrative reliefs can conceal constructed meanings.[360]

It is important to review these arguments before examining the relief program of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, as they emphasize that ideological rhetoric is as vitally present in the narrative as the emblematic reliefs, if perhaps less immediately visible. Nor is the dense emblematicism of Aššurnasirpal's time completely discarded; rather, it continues in the art of the Sargonids in new, reduced forms.[361] The narrative reliefs, I would therefore argue, can be used to uncover rhetorical threads that will help us to better understand the Great Relief at Khinnis.

Sennacherib's palace relief program, like his approach to the peripheral monument, transformed the standard elements of Assyrian narrative relief and arranged them in a manner "fundamentally different" from what went before (fig. 32).[362] It is an approach, as John Malcolm Russell points out in his study of Sennacherib's palace,

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[358] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 40.
[359] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 43.
[360] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 40.
[361] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 70.
[362] Julian Reade, "Space, Scale, and Significance in Assyrian Art," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 11 (1980): 73.

which can be termed *innovation* in its conscious manipulation of established iconographies and introduction of new forms to create new compositions and portray new subject matter.[363] First excavated by Layard, an especially characteristic subject for Sennacherib's extant reliefs are domestic internal events such as building and quarrying, a new focus for Assyrian reliefs. We have touched on the prominence of building accounts in the palace inscriptions in the last chapter, and the reliefs likewise evince an interest in highlighting the king's civic construction activities.[364]

Returning to Court VI, we find these images to be especially prominent, a room away from Sennacherib's throneroom (fig. 33). Here, slabs 43-68 along the north and east walls of the court portray the quarrying, raising, and transportation of the massive bull colossi that were to embellish the monumental entrances of the palace. Vast lines of workmen, watched by surveyors and taskmasters, first carve the block from the quarry (slabs 66-68, figs. 34, 35), lift it upright (slabs 63-64, figs. 36, 37), and then struggle to drag it away for transport to the palace (slabs 43-56, figs. 38, 39). In many of these scenes the king himself is present, as in the upper left in slab 63, watching over the construction activities carried out under his command. It is an important detail, which establishes his agency as royal builder, in the same manner his salmu at Khinnis oversee the functioning of the canal head. The sequence of reliefs in fact leads directly to the bull colossi placed in door "c," juxtaposing the images of quarrying and transport with their

[363] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 179.
[364] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 16.

products now installed into the palace and thus highlighting the king's "visible achievements."[365]

As I discussed in detail in the last chapter, the texts of the bull colossi in Court VI exhibit a dichotomy between war and construction in their titularies.[366] The door "c" text, appropriately given its placement in the midst of a building sequence, emphasizes Sennacherib's role as builder and propagated of Assyrian prosperity. The door "a" text on the other hand emphasizes Sennacherib's role as warrior and conqueror, and indeed the subject of the reliefs on the south and west walls of Court VI, although badly damaged, appear to be a series of military campaigns: the movement of troops (slabs 1-11, figs. 40, 41), what may be the sacking of a fortified city and a cavalry engagement (slabs 16-31), and possibly another siege (slabs 38-39). The titularies thus follow the narratives they are set within, emphasizing the "two different aspects of the king's rule" as builder and military leader.[367] The images and texts, working in parallel, provide in Court VI a dual portrait of the monarch as he wished to be seen, an "imperial ideology" which rested upon claims to both military superiority and internal prosperity in juxtaposition.[368]

The situation is not so different from Winter's reading of Aššurnasirpal's throneroom program as a large-scale evocation of the empire's geographical extent in arrangement, an emblematic concept writ large as a visual program. In a sense, Court VI's relief program also presents a chiastic composition very similar to Ataç's

365 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 188.
366 See above, 32-4.
367 Russell, "Bulls," 31-5.
368 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 265.

articulation of the "encounter" formula of *sacerdotium* and *regnum*. In this case, however, the message of complimentary duality is presented as an entire relief program rather than an emblematic formula, and the facets of kingship have been shifted from cultic and royal authority to civil and military authority, in line with the necessity of legibly communicating "shared needs" which Winter articulates for the Sargonid period.

A close look at slab 61, portraying Sennacherib in a richly-decorated chariot drawn by servants alongside a marshy canebrake, will reveal another of Sennacherib's innovations, the use of epigraphs to label the imagery. One such appears to the king's left on the slab, reading:

> Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria, huge protecting bull colossi which were made in the district of Balatai for his royal palace which is in Nineveh, he had joyfully transported.[369]

Even in its damaged state, the label informs us that Sennacherib was most likely here supervising the transport of one the colossi depicted in the other slabs, as it was rolled towards the construction site of his new palace. Winter has pointed out that for a literate audience the presence of these epigraphs would have "quickened" the image, preventing misinterpretation and "anchoring" the image in the viewer's understanding.[370] In contrast to Aššurnasirpal's Standard Inscription, carved across each slab of his palace without regard for the immediately present subject matter, the epigraphs refer *only* to the visual imagery they label, meaning that besides the bull colossi texts there are no large-scale inscriptions competing with the reliefs for the eye of the viewer.[371]

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[369] Barnett et al., 66-7 no. 148.
[370] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 36.
[371] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 26, 33.

"The very presence of labels," writes Russell, "connotes specificity," and indeed one of the most striking innovations of Sennacherib's reliefs is the manner in which landscape is utilized to give an objective appearance to the events depicted.[372] A look at slab 23 (fig. 42), from the throneroom reveals a city or fortress, standing above a row of trees with the landscape receding into the background above it. What is especially remarkable in this image is the detail lavished on the trees at the bottom of the relief, such that the shape of individual leaves and fruit can be made out. The shape of the foliage is specific enough that an informed observer could determine where the action was taking place geographically, a verisimilitude that sets the action in a real place in the world.[373] Like the epigraph labels, this closely observed specificity serves to "quicken" the events depicted within it.[374] Moreover, this concern with placing events "in the real world" serves to *naturalize* them, as the message is thus "seemingly founded in nature," and the ideological message is given an appearance of objective truth.[375]

These landscapes provide more than details that create an appearance of veracity, however. They also work as narrative contexts for the king's activities, a "unified visual field in which the action takes place."[376] In contrast to the narrative reliefs of Aššurnasirpal II and Sargon II, in which action takes place grounded on the bottom line of the register, figures are scattered almost panoramically across the picture plane to

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372 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 22.
373 Marcus, 199; Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 205.
374 Irene J. Winter, "Tree(s) on the Mountain: Landscape and Territory on the Victory Stele of Naram-Sîn of Agade," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East, 2: From the Third Millenium BCE* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 126.
375 Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 23.
376 Winter, "Tree(s)," 119.

provide a sense of depth and location. Returning to slab 23, we can observe that the line of detailed trees across the bottom is situated on the base-line of the relief. Above the city, however, a number of trees are scattered across a plain of patterned chevrons or molehills. These are stylized mountains, signifying the ground or earth, and in fact can be seen serving a similar purpose in the bottom register of the glazed-brick panel from Nimrud discussed earlier.[377] In the Southwest Palace, this pattern is utilized to indicate the ground plane, which is thus brought forward and creates a field for action wherein figures are closer or further from the viewer depending on their location above or below.[378]

These same conventions seem to be operating in slab 63, in which workers leverage a bull colossus upright. This action clearly takes place in the foreground, while a line of soldiers (present presumably to keep the workers in line or provide security for the monument) watches from behind (above). Beyond the soldiers, an undulating scale-pattered landscape is depicted filled with deciduous and conifer trees. The king again presents himself as intimately involved in his civil works, as he observes these activities from his servant-drawn chariot in the upper left. "Never before in Assyrian art," Russell writes, "had the image of the king been so thoroughly dominated by his surroundings.

[377] Reade, "Glazed-Brick Panel," 42.

[378] It is interesting to note as well that the trees in this upper portion of the slab are much more schematic and undifferentiated than those below the fortress. This is understandable considering the evident perspective rules of Sennacherib's reliefs, as these would be closer to the viewer and thus "easier to make out" in a true landscape. Additionally, as these detailed trees are placed along the ground line (at the level of the floor, in fact), their veracious detail might also be thought of as "grounding" the image by locating it in real time and space. It may also simply be the case that the more schematized trees are thought of as existing in a wilderness beyond the city, while the ground below is occupied by a cultivated orchard.

And yet, visually, the accomplishment of the king has not diminished with his apparent stature."[379]

Indeed, if anything the landscape hanging above the little king serves to emphasize the difficulty of transport, the massive resources in men, materials and ingenious technological expertise necessary to create such monuments and move them to the empire's center, thus enhancing immeasurably the profile of the king as the originator of these activities. Images of Mesopotamian rulers in the landscape have long served to indicate the king's mastery over nature, and provided the "figurative ground on which the ruler positions himself."[380] In the case of Sennacherib's reliefs, the use of topography to indicate the king's control of the natural world becomes omnipresent, leading Michelle Marcus to see in Sennacherib's reliefs "an obsession with mastering physical space."[381]

Sennacherib's palace program also utilizes a novel approach to portraying rivers and waterways. Water is present in a vast number of these images, running up, down, across and diagonally. It is present in slabs 63 and 64, running along the bottom of the image as little figures drop buckets in, or again in all of the slabs in Rooms XIV and XVII, in which entire sequences are underlined by a band of water containing fish (fig. 43). It also appears to divide compositions horizontally: a sequence of slabs in Room V are divided in this way, with a band of water along which troops and the king himself march (fig. 44). Bodies of water were often used in Assyrian inscriptions to denote the

379 Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 212.
380 Winter, "Tree(s)," 114, 120.
381 Marcus, 200.

political boundaries of the empire, and Sennacherib employs the phrase "from the upper sea to the lower sea" to denote his empire in the Khinnis inscription.[382]

In these instances, the watercourses do serve as boundaries for the composition, or to subdivide it into registers, another instance in which Sennacherib's reliefs use naturalistic elements in creating a constructed image. Moreover, watercourses in other periods of Mesopotamian art could serve to indicate the "fertility…of the internal landscape, properly managed by the socio-political system."[383] Given the intense interest of Sennacherib in water projects which contributed to the internal prosperity of the state in a monumental way, it may not be wholly far-fetched to see this interest reflected in the ubiquitous presence of waterways in the palace. It should also be noted that in both of these examples Sennacherib seems to be *using* the waterway for building and conquest. In the first instance, water is possibly being drawn to wet the track of the sledge that will carry the bull colossus, or else simply an image of the irrigation systems at work, while slab 53 from Court VI shows a waterway carrying construction materials for the king. In the second, on slab 30 from Room V, the king and his troops seem to follow the waterway almost as they would a road, which delivers them to the object of the campaign.

We have stressed above the centrality of the throneroom for exhibiting, in monumental form, ideas about the nature of the Assyrian state and the nature of the institution of kingship, and the throneroom of Sennacherib may also hold information

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[382] Luckenbill, 78: 4; see also Harmanşah, 188.
[383] Winter, "Tree(s)," 116. See, for example, the investiture scene of Zimri-Lim at Mari in Strommenger, fig. 165.

that can bring nuance to our understanding of Sennacherib's rhetoric of kingship. Nineveh was sacked during the collapse of the Assyrian empire in the late seventh century BCE, and the throneroom (Room I in Layard's excavation plan) seems to have suffered particular damage during this event (fig. 45). As a result less than half of the reliefs that would have embellished this room and the adjoining Room III survive; nevertheless, Winter felt the reliefs which remain exhibit a program that encapsulated the empire in microcosm.[384] While her initial interpretation, hinging on two different eastern and western campaigns on the opposite walls of the same room, has since been disproved (they seem to all be a part of a single campaign in the Levant),[385] Russell's work in fact confirms her opinion on a much broader scale. He argues that Rooms I, III, IV and V, as well as the forecourt (H) and inner Court VI form a "throne-room suite," with each devoted to a different campaign at the extremities of the empire: a Babylonian campaign in Court H and Room III, a western/Levantine campaign in Room I, an eastern campaign in Room V and on the south and west walls of Court VI, and construction and irrigation "campaigns" on the north and east walls of Court VI.[386] All major avenues of the expression of Sennacherib's power were thus expressed in this section of the palace, both geographically (in terms of the distribution of campaigns) and in kind (military and civic).

The loss of the left-hand end of the throneroom, where following convention the king would be seated, and the slab opposite the main entrance means we shall never

[384] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 27.
[385] See Barnett et al., 50-4.
[386] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 257.

know with what sort imagery these pivotal points would have been embellished with. Nor are we helped much by the example of previous palaces. Aššurnasirpal's sacred tree emblem behind the throne may be misleading; the sacred tree becomes increasingly scarce during the reigns of later kings, such that by the time of Sargon II it is used mostly for marking the corners of rooms, only rarely appearing with symmetrical attendants on either side (fig. 46).[387] It seems to have disappeared from Sennacherib's program entirely, as had almost all the "heraldic" compositions familiar from Aššurnasirpal's day.[388] Nor can we glean anything from Sargon's throneroom: the slabs opposite the entrance and behind the throne were left blank, and while Julian Reade has speculated that these spaces may have been covered in massive ritual wall-hangings, this brings us no closer to an understanding of Sennacherib's throneroom imagery.[389]

What we *do* have, however, are the reliefs at the opposite end of the throne hall, those situated in Room III. As mentioned above, this small room off the eastern end of the throneroom contained reliefs portraying a campaign in the south, and the relief opposite the entrance (slab 8) contains an epigraph reading, "Dilbat I besieged, I conquered, I carried off its spoil" (fig. 47).[390] The city of Dilbat (Tell Dulaim) was less than fifty kilometers from Babylon itself, and the reliefs must relate to one of Sennacherib's forays into Babylonia.[391] The relief contains three registers. The lowest (and most damaged) appears to have shown a city above a river sacked by Assyrian

[387] Pauline Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilizations, 1986), 57-8.
[388] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 35
[389] Julian Reade, "The Architectural Context of Assyrian Sculpture," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 11, 81.
[390] Barnett et al., 55 no. 45.
[391] See Roaf, 199.

troops, while the king looks on from his chariot, and a small cultic scene with altar and musicians in the lower right corner. Those above, the second separated from the city by another waterway and the third by a line, portray Assyrian soldiers chopping down trees with axes and pushing them over. The trees are palms, with hanging bunches that may be dates.

Ataç has argued that images of tree cutting were often placed in conceptual analogy with human slaughter in warfare, and in fact Winter notes that images of felled trees and piles of human heads are placed next to one another in Aššurnasirpal's reliefs.[392] Aššurnasirpal's reliefs also feature images of soldiers cutting down trees in the midst of warfare, in which soldiers destroy orchards below a city even as a battle rages beyond and the enemy shoots arrows at them from the city walls.[393] Despoiling the land's trees, I would argue, was not merely considered an activity that harmed the enemy's agricultural or economic productivity, but one that was rhetorically employed to represent the "beheading" of the enemy state's fertility. Given the emblematic associations of the date palm in Assyria as a "tree of abundance" discussed above, imagery of date palms being cut down by Assyrian soldiers amounts to the same form of "topocide" that seems to appear in the Khinnis inscription in relation to Babylon. It is not merely the enemy's defeat, but the "felling" of the enemy land so that Assyria's own vegetal growth may continue unrivalled.

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[392] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 66; Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 18.
[393] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 12.

In examining the throneroom program of Aššurnasirpal II, Irene Winter considers a relief placed in the same position as slab 8, likewise in a small room off the far end of the throne hall (Room C, slab 8).[394] "Because of its placement," she writes, "this relief, too, effectively participates in the decorative scheme of Room B– situated, in fact, directly opposite the king himself, installed on his throne at the eastern end."[395] If, hypothetically, the imagery behind the king's throne related to the themes we have covered so far in regards to the sacred tree behind Aššurnasirpal's throne –state fertility, state growth, divine sanction of the Assyrian kingship as agent of growth– then the images of slab 8 at the hall's opposite end might be thought of as the opposing facet of royal power: the authority to destroy rival prosperity, to lay waste, with the king's presence outside the walls of Dilbat emphasizing royal agency in these activities.

The throneroom would thus contain the same dichotomy of royal creation and destruction present in the Khinnis inscription and Court VI, where it is explicitly stated in the Door "c" titulary: "[Aššur] gave me a just scepter that enlarges the land, and put into my hands an unspairing sword for the overthrow of the enemy."[396] As slab 8 shows, these themes would be communicated in narrative rather than emblematic format, following the historical development Winter articulates. This is, of course, speculation, and the loss of the reliefs at the opposite end means that its imagery is closed to us. Yet I would argue

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[394] Erika Bleibtreu notes that another small Room II was hypothetically added to the other end of the throne hall in Layard's excavation plans, but no trace was found during later excavations undertaken by T.E. Madhloom. Sennacherib's throneroom would likely therefore have followed the plan of Aššurnasirpal's, with the hall ending in a wall behind the throne and a small chamber at the opposite end; see Barnett et al., 54.
[395] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 8.
[396] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 246.

that the fact this imagery is set in the south, in Babylonia, works to buttress this interpretation. Given the centrality of Babylonian policy to Sennacherib's reign, it would be especially appropriate for narratives that might be thought to relate directly to Sennacherib's construction of kingship as an institution. Indeed, the Babylonian campaigns were thought important enough that they were pictured on the façade of the palace.[397]

Russell argues that, ultimately, the Southwest Palace and its relief program serves as a functional tool to maintain imperial stability. The palace itself, as a work of architecture and investment of labor and materials, functions as a "concrete statement of the value of benevolent and stable government." Indeed, the enemies who once threatened the empire from the periphery on one side of Court VI are pressed into labor on the other to "build Assyria."[398] Thus an aspect of Sennacherib's rhetoric of institutional kingship appears to be the king's ability to ingeniously harness and direct powerful forces for the benefit of state and people, as confirmed in the Khinnis inscription's preoccupation with the use of water to attain imperial goals. Yet implicit in both the palace reliefs and the Khinnis inscription is an ambivalent portrayal of the nature of that ability to control. The king both creates and destroys with his ability to manipulate natural forces, a theme which would have been implicit in the narrative throneroom reliefs if my proposed reconstruction is in any way correct. It is a theme which we will return to.

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[397] Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 35.
[398] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 260-2.

Before leaving Sennacherib's palace, it should be stated that there is in fact one area where the heraldic compositions of earlier programs is left in place: the arrangement of gate reliefs and bull colossi. These are damaged, but enough remains to indicate that they followed the pattern of Sargon II's main palace entrance at Khorsabad, which was excavated intact in the nineteenth century.[399] A total of six bull colossi would have been present, two for each side of the main entrance façade, and another two on either side of the entrance itself. Between those on the façade on either side would have been a long-haired, bearded "hero" or *lahmu* figure clutching a lion. At right angles to the façade were slabs with representations of winged *apkallus*.[400] Pauline Albenda has called this heraldic arrangement of heroes and colossi the "Grand Royal Emblem" in her study of Khorsabad, and has pointed out that the display of winged bull colossi was a royal prerogative which may therefore associate the hero figure with royalty. The *lahmu* is well known from Akkadian cylinder seals, and its presence can be considered an evocation of Mesopotamia's first empire.[401] The *lahmu*, strong-arming lions into submission, may therefore be associated with the might and legitimacy of Assyrian kingship, both physical and historical.[402] Irene Winter has also pointed out the general Assyrian practice of using mythological figures to control "the liminality of the threshold," which seems to find confirmation not only here but in Sargon and Aššurnasirpal's use of sacred trees to "seal" the corners of rooms.[403] That these are of course the main entrances of the palaces would

399 Albenda, *Palace of Sargon*, 44-5.
400 Barnett et al., 48.
401 Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 174.
402 Albenda, *Palace of Sargon*, 102.
403 Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 21.

require a suitably impressive series of mythical figures, and one which (as the Court VI reliefs indicate) would self-evidently proclaim the resources of the king in carving and transporting them. We will return to these themes in discussing the Gate Relief below.

The foregoing analysis of the main structural themes of iconography and ideology contained within the Palace Without Rival has shown that the same kinds of rhetorical concerns articulated in the Khinnis inscription are present in the palace as well, namely the dichotomy of nurture and control, the preoccupation with landscape and waterways, and the king's ingenious ability to use these for the benefit of the state. We have seen, moreover, the function of the throneroom as a center of disseminated ideological imagery related to Assyrian kingship, and hence I have argued that the configuration of the throneroom would have reflected this same dualism of creation and destruction. Historically speaking, the increasing use of narrative in the Assyrian palace reliefs (and the concomitant emphasis on legibility and specificity) indicates this dualism would have been expressed in a narrative format, and thus the opposite end of the throneroom holds slab 8, containing imagery of Sennacherib's troops felling trees while on campaign, presenting a narrative vision of the destructive side of monarchical power. If the opposing wall behind the king's throne contained narrative imagery centered on the creative side of this power, then the same dichotomy present in Court VI would also be contained within the throneroom, to be projected across the empire.

Chapter 4: Gods, *Ilus* and the Great Relief

We are now a position to analyze the figures of the Great Relief, in light of the persistent themes articulated both for the Khinnis inscription and Sennacherib's palace, the interrelationship between palatial relief and monuments on the Assyrian periphery, and the manner in which the Great Relief functions emblematically, informed by an understanding of the sacred tree. Beginning with an examination of the iconography used to articulate these figures, I proceed with a consideration of the choice to use anthropomorphic figures of the gods rather than divine symbols, and a discussion of the connotations which the word *ilu*, "god," would have had for the Assyrians. This concludes with a consideration of the emblematic placement and accoutrements of the gods within the Great Relief, and a unified interpretation of the relief's presentation of Assyrian kingship.

The two deities confront one another, each attended by the duplicated figures of the king, in a symmetrical emblematic composition which contains both of the formulaic principles articulated by Ataç: chiastic encounter of opposites (in the meeting of the two distinct gods) and bilateral complimentarity (in the duplicated, identical figures of Sennacherib flanking them). As discussed, the Great Relief appears to take elements from both the peripheral monuments, as an official royal image set at a charged place within the landscape, and the sacred tree emblem, representing the duplicated king flanking either side of an image related to the ideological basis of Assyrian kingship. In contrast to the king figures of the sacred tree composition and the peripheral monuments, however, the kings of the Great Relief are undifferentiated and do not make the pointing gesture.

Kingship, as Henri Frankfort points out, was considered to be inherent in its insignia, which had "descended from heaven" in mythic times.[404] Likewise, Irene Winter has observed that to the Assyrian viewer personal appearance and identity may have been inseparable from the garments that indicated office, and the garments and accoutrements of Sennacherib's figures therefore deserve careful study.[405] The scepter Sennacherib holds, for example, which the Door "c" text titulary tells us was used to "enlarge the land," is called the "ruler of peoples" in an inscription of Adad-Nirari II (911-891 BCE), and was bestowed on the king by Aššur himself.[406] This object appears in the *salmu* of peripheral monuments, and Ann Shafer observes that the scepter was related to cultic activities, as it signaled "the king's divinely-given position for enforcing order."[407] Authority both cultic and terrestrial was therefore implicit in this object, or perhaps more correctly the cultic sanction to rule the terrestrial.

Likewise, Bachmann considers the garment Sennacherib wears to be "cultic" in nature, conservative to the point of archaism.[408] It is a robe reaching to the ankles, made up of overlapping spiral elements cinched at the waist, and overhanging the king's right arm. This is the same robe that appears in Sennacherib's king niche *salmu* in the cliff side above the Great Relief, and Shafer identifies it as the robe worn in the king's role as chief priest of Aššur.[409] The small, oval-shaped object Sennacherib holds up before his face, in contrast to the usual "stretching-the-finger" gesture portrayed on the peripheral-type

[404] Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 237.
[405] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 88.
[406] Albenda, "Kingship," 49-50.
[407] Shafer, "Carving," 56.
[408] Bachmann, 8-9.
[409] Shafer, "Carving," 53.

monuments above, is known from other monuments besides those at Khinnis and Maltaï, where the king appears to hold something similar. Reade identifies this gesture as a motion of prayer or reverence deriving from Babylon, and attributes its appearance here to Sennacherib's introduction of Babylonian customs to the cult of Aššur after the sack of Babylon in 689. He observes that it may signify "the integration of Babylonian and Assyrian kingship, or Ashur's appropriation of many of Marduk's attributes."[410] Tallay Ornan explicitly connects this novel arrangement, which she identifies as the "nose-rubbing" gesture, with Sennacherib's efforts to make "Assyria into a second Babylonia."[411]

The crown or headdress of Sennacherib is of especial interest, being the object which best identifies the monarch, and it seems to embody some of the themes traced above in discussing Sennacherib's palace reliefs. In contrast to the much more modest headgear worn by earlier kings, this thick, cone-like cylinder of a crown seems to have first appeared during the reign of Sargon II, and became the norm in Sennacherib's time.[412] Like the Egyptian crown, which combined elements signifying the iconographic and geographic union of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Assyrian crown appears to have been composed of two elements signifying a "unified kingship": a fez-like mitre and a pointed headdress contained within.[413] Holly Pittman has suggested that this double crown, which first appears on the White Obelisk, may initially have had geographical

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410 Julian Reade, "Shikaft-i Gulgul: Its Date and Symbolism," *Iranica Antiqua* 12 (1977), 34-5.
411 Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2005), 86.
412 Shafer, "Carving," 276.
413 Ataç, "Formula," 76.

symbolism, using the cone-like headgear of the Babylonian kings of the Kassite period to signify the political alliance of Assyria and Babylon against Aramean invasions at the end of the second millennium.[414] Yet there are also suggestions that by the Sargonid era the Assyrian crown signified the unity of different facets of kingship. The officials of the late second millennium were often pictured wearing the fez or mitre, while the spike or cone emerging from the top seems to reference the characteristic spiked helmets of Assyrian soldiers. Samuel Paley thus interprets the crown as a sartorial combination of the king's roles, signifying his position as both administrator and warlord simultaneously.[415] The juxtaposition of activities found in Court VI can thus be found adorning the very person of the king.

Many of the iconographic elements that identify the two deities as Aššur and Mullissu have been examined in the first chapter,[416] but there are several details that bear mentioning here. The lion was long connected with mother goddesses in the ancient Near East, an association going back at least to Hittite imagery of the Bronze Age, and the goddess here appears to fulfill a similar role.[417] As mentioned in Chapter 1, the goddess seems to be a syncretic combination of Mullissu, Ninlil and Ishtar, and there are several details linking the goddess with the "provisioning of abundance for the land."[418] Rosettes, which prominently decorate Mullissu's figure, were a symbol of vegetal fertility

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414 Pittman, 52-3.
415 Paley, 31
416 See above, 17-8.
417 Robert L. Alexander, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of Yazılıkaya* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), 65.
418 Winter, "Rhetoric of Abundance," 171.

associated especially with Ishtar.[419] Winter argues that the palmette which sprouts from Mullissu's rod, along with the rosettes that adorn her body, represent the "literal consequences" of the waters provided by Sennacherib's canal system, and associate this figure even further with notions of fertility and fecundity.[420]

The creature Aššur stands upon, the "snake-dragon" or *mušhuššu*, was the familiar of the Babylonian Marduk, and its assimilation to Aššur during Sennacherib's reign must be seen in the context of his appropriation of numerous Babylonian elements into Aššur's cult in the wake of the sack of Babylon.[421] Like Mullissu, he carries the ensemble of implements called the "rod-and-ring" in his left hand, but whereas Mullissu's right hand is open and lifted towards her husband, Aššur carries the same form of curved club held by the *lahmu* heroes of the palace entrances. Held by such figures, associated with royal strength and legitimacy, the curved club must indicate similar associations for Aššur, who in a sense *was* the Assyrian state. The rod and ring, as mentioned above, seem to have been derived from building measures, especially appropriate objects to include in an image commemorating a massive civil works project.[422] Ataç argues that these objects, conferred on rulers by divinities in scenes throughout the history of Mesopotamian art, were especially associated with the conferral of royal and temporal power.[423]

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[419] Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 34.
[420] Winter, "Rhetoric of Abundance," 172.
[421] Ataç notes that the beasts of Sennacherib's rock reliefs are actually horned and thus more properly identified as *bašmu*, but the connection between these creatures was strong and they were in fact often interchangeable; Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 180.
[422] Smith, 207.
[423] Ataç, "Visual Formula," 87.

Sennacherib's decision to use massive, anthropomorphic depictions of gods on their familiars is new in Assyrian relief, and while similar, smaller figures would be used on the monuments of his successor Esarhaddon, such depictions never appear in monumental proportions again.[424] In an article examining the anthropomorphic deities of Sennacherib's rock reliefs, Tallay Ornan notes that these embodied gods appear to be unique to Sennacherib's aqueduct system. Their absence elsewhere (such as in the palace program), as well as the vast size of the Great Relief and the reliefs at Maltaï and Faida, indicates that the anthropomorphic god monuments "played a significant ideological role" designed specifically for the hydraulic systems.[425] Two relief groups in particular, situated at Maltaï and Faida along Sennacherib's Northern canal system, were likely carved before the Great Relief and contain important precedents for the later sculpture.

The reliefs at Faida are badly worn (fig. 48) but appear to have been very similar in composition to the Maltaï sculptures, and hence it is to the four identical reliefs at Maltaï that we may turn for imagery that may inform our understanding of the Great

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[424] Shafer, "Carving," 63 n. 55, actually questions whether the reliefs at Khinnis and Maltaï were not carved under Esarhaddon rather than Sennacherib, given the former's use of anthropomorphic deities with animal familiars on numerous stelae and rock reliefs. This seems unlikely for a number of reasons. Such figures, while never appearing in monumental relief, are known from cylinder and glyptic from the Middle Assyrian period on, and in fact Sennacherib commissioned a statue of the local divinity Sanda standing atop its animal familiar for the city of Tarsus, images of which later appear on Roman coins from the city. Ornan points out as well that Sennacherib's monuments consistently show these anthropomorphic deities as larger than the king, whereas Esarhaddon's monuments shrink them, almost to the size of the divine symbols which signify divine presence on the majority of Assyrian monuments. Finally, there simply seems to be little reason Esarhaddon would carve his own reliefs to commemorate the achievements of his father. See Ornan, *Triumph of the Symbol*, 84-5; Stephanie Dalley, "Sennacherib and Tarsus," *Anatolian Studies* 49 (1999), 74-5.

[425] Tallay Ornan, "The Godlike Semblance of a King: the Case of Sennacherib's Rock Reliefs," in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context: Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter by Her Students*, 171.

Relief (fig. 49).[426] Sennacherib is again duplicated here on either side of a group of deities, though in this instance seven gods march in procession rather than two facing one another. Aššur leads the group of four male and two female gods, followed by his consort Mullissu. The gods stand upon their animal familiars, and in fact Mullissu is seated in a chair placed atop hers. The Great Relief appears to have condensed this procession into a single confrontational emblem, reduced to the two essential divinities.

A precedent for Sennacherib's employment of these kinds of figures can, in fact, be found to the west, among the Neo-Hittite states of Syria and Anatolia, with whom the Assyrian empire had extensive dealings throughout its history. Contact with one of these states, Carchemish, seems to have especially spurred the use of architectural relief in the time of Aššurnasirpal II, and the Sargonid era, a period considered the "zenith" of imperial cosmopolitanism, saw a vogue for Neo-Hittite and north Syrian styles as well.[427] Winter argues that the use of landscape rock reliefs in general under Sennacherib is essentially "Hittite" in manner, and "striking evidence of his interest in the west."[428] Indeed, one of the closest parallels for the arrangement of divinities atop animal familiars on the Great Relief is the famous Hittite rock sanctuary at Yazılıkaya, now in central Turkey, where a male and female deity confront one another in a very similar

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426 Ornan, "Semblance," 165.

427 Winter, "Royal Rhetoric," 14-5; Ataç, *Mythology of Kingship*, 52-3.

428 Irene J. Winter, "Art as Evidence for Interaction: Relations Between the Assyrian Empire and North Syria," in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen in Alten Vorderasien vom 1. bis 4. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1982), 368. Hittite sculpture may have also spurred the Assyrians to use rock relief to commemorate springs and waterways, as the Hittites considered these watery features to be liminal spaces between the world of the living and the netherworld; see Harmanşah, 196. See now also Alessandra Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance: The Stone Reliefs at Carchemish and Zincirli in the Earlier First Millenium BCE* (New York: De Gruyter, 2011).

composition (fig. 50).[429] Ornan has in fact proposed we think of Sennacherib's use of such figures as a *reintroduction*, "in a sense a revival of old themes generated by the encounter of Assyrian artists with western models."[430] Regardless, the use of such figures further emphasizes Sennacherib's tendency to take old iconographies and manipulate them in new and ingenious ways to serve the commemorative purposes he intended.

The nature of that commemoration, I would argue, lies in the character and juxtaposition of Aššur and Mullissu themselves. Barbara Nevling Porter has written that the word "god" for us evokes an image of a divine personality or individual, based both on the anthropomorphic images of God in the Hebrew Bible and the larger-than-life personalities familiar from Greek, Roman and Norse mythology. To the Mesoptamians, however, the Akkadian word *ilu* conjured up instead "images of the spectrum of different forms and powers associated with each single divinity." *Ilu* is a multifaceted and fluid concept, and more than a divine person was imagined as "a force of nature or a human power…and by extension, as the power in such phenomena." The *ilu* Ea, for example, god of fresh waters, was also understood to be the power of life inherent in water, and the *ilus* were identified with abstract entities such as animal familiars, numbers, minerals, constellations, and so forth.[431] *Ilus* could also "represent powers and activities manifest in the working of the earth, such as judgment, creation, and the provision of abundance."[432]

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[429] Alexander, 63-7. See now also Lee Z. Ullman, "Movement and the Making of Place in the Hittite Landscape" (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2010).
[430] Ornan, "Semblance," 165.
[431] Barbara Nevling Porter, "The Anxiety of Multiplicity: Concepts of Divinity as One and Many in Ancient Assyria," in *One God or Many? Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World*, ed. by Barbara Nevling Porter (Chebeague, ME: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000), 243.
[432] Porter, "Anxiety," 251.

"An Assyrian *ilu*, in short," writes Porter, "was not a 'god' in our sense but a set of related but not completely congruent qualities, only one of which was imagined as a divine person."[433]The anthropomorphic forms used by Sennacherib, I would argue, were a means to make these abstract entities concrete, in monumental format. If we use Porter's observations in interpreting the Great Relief, it seems clear enough that the figure of Mullissu stands for the *ilu* of "the provision of abundance," based on the ubiquitous vegetal and floral motifs associated with her person. As for Aššur, it was his prerogative to bestow the scepter and crown upon the ruler at his coronation.[434] At this event, the priest of the god proclaimed, "Aššur is King! Aššur is King!" to signify that the earthly ruler incarnated the "imperial will-to-power of Aššur," a concept which Steven Holloway calls "the ideological fulcrum to three centuries of Neo-Assyrian foreign relations."[435] The qualities and forces associated with this god have been discussed above in Chapter 2, and I would reiterate that he appears in the Great Relief as the "hypostasis" of Assyrian kingship, the animating force of royal power.

Aššur may therefore best be compared with the *ilu* Enlil, the ancient Sumerian sky god whose power was the exercise of rule: the use of legitimate force to shape society and promulgate law, to compel obedience.[436] Porter in fact uses Enlil to illustrate the notion that an *ilu* could also be a *function*, in this case the function of rule. The god Nergal, for example, the ruler of the underworld, was described as "*ilu* Enlil of the wide

[433] Porter, "Anxiety," 247.
[434] Albenda, "Kingship," 49.
[435] Holloway, xv.
[436] Frankfort, 279.

underworld," as Nergal's function was compelling rule of that region. Indeed, there could be a number of *ilu* Enlils, each exercising the function of rule or control in their respective domains.[437] In fact, one of the means by which Enlil's position as lord of the universe was assimilated to Aššur was to assert the latter's marriage to Ninlil, who was in turn assimilated to Mullissu, a manipulation of divine relationships which seems to have occurred during Sennacherib's reign, not long after the sack of Babylon.[438]

Besides the Great Relief at Khinnis, a fragmentary stele from Assur attributed to Sennacherib's reign pictures the divine couple facing the king (fig. 51), and Ornan observes that the prominence of imagery of Aššur and Mullissu with the king seems to have paralleled the appearance of images of the Sennacherib and his queen Naqi'a in official contexts, another practice that may have derived from Anatolian inspiration.[439] Interestingly, the appearance of the divine couple Aššur and Mullissu as a focus for emblematic, monumental imagery also seems to parallel descriptions of the divine in hymns from the Assyrian empire. Porter notes that Aššur is often paired or juxtaposed with other gods in these texts as a "descriptive strategy," evidently to emphasize the chief deity's connection with the functional *ilu* of another god. Examples of such formulations are "Aššur-Ishtar," one of the most popular, or "Aššur-Adad." Porter points out that this juxtaposition does not imply the absorption of one god into another, but rather implies "some degree of equivalence between two gods in terms of a shared function or

[437] Porter, "Anxiety," 245-6.
[438] Porter, "Anxiety," 263; Reade, "Shikaft-i Gulgul," 42.
[439] Ornan, *Triumph of the Symbol*, 81, 85.

quality."[440] It may be that a similar pairing is occurring on the Great Relief, especially given the characteristic haziness with which the Mesopotamians distinguished between literary or visual representation discussed in Chapter 2.

The parallelism between Aššur and Mullissu and Sennacherib and Naqi'a would seem to point to a visual equation of rulers and gods, and Tallay Ornan argues that the compositional devices used in Sennacherib's rock reliefs work to elevate the monarch to the conceptual level of a deity. At Maltaï, for example, the distinction between the seven deities and the single worshipper at its head emphasizes the singular importance of the king's relationship with the gods. The reduced number of deities at Khinnis, moreover, further elevates the king's *salmu* as it is still duplicated on either side of the supreme pair. This relationship is inverted on the Gate Relief at Khinnis: here, Sennacherib stands between Aššur and another figure likely to be Mullissu, though the emphasis is clearly on the relationship between the king and Aššur as it is to the latter Sennacherib faces. The end of the Gate Relief block, in which Aššur is depicted frontally with the king on either side, can likewise be argued to elevate the king's image, as it echoes a Mesopotamian tendency to place minor divinities on either side of images of important gods, and hence confuses the royal image with a minor divinity by a "simile of placement." The king's positioning on the Gate Relief block, directly above the *lahmu* hero, likewise makes a visual equivalence between the king and this divine representation of strength.[441] Ornan observes that such equivalences, visually confusing god and king, are especially

[440] Porter, "Anxiety," 235-7.
[441] Ornan, "Semblance," 166-8.

appropriate for the reliefs carved to commemorate Sennacherib's aqueduct systems, "a 'divine-like' intervention in the order of nature itself," which "may have encouraged royal ambitions to render the figure in charge of these systems as if, indeed, he were a god."[442]

A curious element Ornan includes in her discussion are the tiny royal *salmu* within the rings held by both gods. Ornan notes that in Assyrian imagery it is normally small representations of gods that adorn the figure and accoutrements of kings, rather than the reverse, and argues that this further works to confuse the distinction between god and monarch, who in this case "could be perceived as if he were a second supernatural protective divinity." Ornan also writes, however, that by this use of the king's image, "the physical nexus of the king to the gods is strongly demonstrated."[443] Indeed, despite Ornan's observations on the "similes of placement" at Khinnis that seem to raise the king to the divine sphere, the emphasis in the inscriptions is on the king's humility before the divine. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Shafer translates the phrase "my royal image in the attitude of salutation" as "expressions of humility" before the deities represented at the site, a phrase that is "unique in the history of peripheral monuments."[444] Likewise, the Khinnis inscription begins with an invocation of a number of divinities, emphasizing Sennacherib's piety and reverence for the gods represented at the site.

A fundamental aspect of kingship and cosmology in the ancient Near East was the ruler's mediating role between the gods and the people, all the more so in a state such as

[442] Ornan, "Semblance," 172.
[443] Ornan, "Semblance," 166.
[444] Shafer, "Carving," 288.

Assyria whose tutelary *ilu* functioned as the empire's drive to expansion and consolidation. The monarch essentially acted as a kind of conduit between gods and people, distributing divine agency through his own acts. Irene Winter has described this process as one of "cascading indexical relationships," from god to king to works, in the same manner that the king's agency was in turn distributed through his officials.[445] We have examined above the manner in which the duplicated monarchs on either side of the sacred tree emphasize the king's agency in propagating Assyrian prosperity and securing divine sanction for the state, and I would argue that here again the duplicated king figures within the rings emphasize the king's imbuement with the functional powers that these two *ilus* represent. The two large royal figures engage with the divine pair as a composite juxtaposition, while the small figures within the rings ensure that each of the two deities also receive the same treatment *individually*, without breaking the emblematic integrity of the whole by placing "normal sized" figures of Sennacherib between the gods. Sennacherib's *salmus* thus channel both of the *ilu* functions embodied by Aššur and Mullissu singularly and as a composite. And the *ilus* of these figures, confronting one another and mediated by the king, are the paired functions of control, compulsion, and force (Aššur) and fertility, abundance, and prosperity (Mullissu).

Nurture and Control

Drawing together the disparate threads discussed above, we can create a nuanced interpretation of the Great Relief as a whole.

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[445] Irene J. Winter, "Agency Marked, Agency Ascribed: the Affective Object in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *On Art in the Ancient Near East, 2: From the Third Millenium BCE*, 312-4.

The Great Relief appears to be related to the Assyrian tradition of peripheral monuments, which delineate the Assyrian landscape and empire and emphasize the institutional and personal role of kingship in propagating state growth. Moreover, the *salam šarrutiya* distributes the agency of the king throughout Assyria, to the most distant borders of the empire. These images, like the agency they embody, have their source in the palace at the empire's heart, both in the person of the king and the ideological center of the throneroom. As Shafer's work argues, numerous elements of the peripheral monuments relate directly to the sacred tree emblem carved behind the king's throne, representing the king as the "root" of Assyria's budding, vegetal growth.

Both the sacred tree and the peripheral monuments are emblematic compositions that rely on juxtaposition, symmetry, and other compositional techniques to create an image which is beyond time, occurring in the divine or mythical realm, and communicates its message through the viewer's apprehension of various "connotative layers." As an emblematic composition the Great Relief follows this strategy, containing references to both the peripheral monuments and the sacred tree in its use of king figures and placement in the landscape, and communicating complex ideological messages about the institution of kingship.

The gradual shift from emblematic to narrative images in the palace reliefs programs, according to Winter, appears to follow the historical development of the empire, in which legibility became an increasing concern in an expanding state in which less and less of the populace would be able to interpret the emblematic and cultic imagery of Aššurnasirpal II's day. Yet many of the themes present both visually and verbally at

Khinnis (water, innovation, technical expertise, the king as builder, control of the landscape) appear in narrative idiom in Sennacherib's palace. Two areas within the Southwest Palace especially seem to embody a specific thread of Sennacherib's rhetoric of kingship: Court VI and the throneroom. In Court VI, images of war are juxtaposed with images of construction, on opposite sides of the same space and in a kind of confrontation with each other. If the interpretation presented above is correct, then the throneroom would exhibit the same kind of dichotomy, more squarely focused on state abundance in Assyria (hypothetically behind the throne) and its destruction in enemy lands (on the opposite end of the hall, on slab 8 in Room III). The agent of both is of course the king, whose omnipresence in the war and building reliefs of Court VI and the tree-felling imagery of Room III emphasizes his authorship of these activities. As argued, the throneroom likewise serves as a kind of fulcrum for the projection of royal rhetoric. The rhetorical concerns presented in narrative format in the throneroom could thus be thought of as meshing with royal rhetoric, both visual and textual, throughout the empire.

Sennacherib's evident concern with legibility and increasing use of narrative and "objectivity" in the palace reliefs would likewise inform his decision to use anthropomorphic depictions of deities in his aqueduct reliefs, a choice that also confirms his rhetorical claims to innovation and personal ingenuity. The figures and composition of the Great Relief itself seem to reflect the ideological concerns contained within the palace, translated into dense emblematic format. The gods represented are not simply gods, but *ilus*, and can thus embody what we would think of as abstract functions. Aššur seems to operate as the *ilu* of state force and compulsion, and Mullissu as the *ilu* of state-

created abundance and prosperity. In other words, the same ideological dynamic of Nurture and Control that appears in the throneroom, in Court VI, and in the Khinnis inscription itself. The king's placement in the Great Relief, in an "attitude of humility" both before the gods individually and as a juxtaposed, emblematic duality, emphasizes his mediation of both of these functions at once.

The Great Relief thus presents us with a true *salam šarrutiya*, a constructed image of two facets of kingship which Sennacherib claimed to channel and reconcile within his rule.[446] At Khinnis, these dual faces of Assyrian kingship are indicated in the inscription by the creation of an abundant hinterland for the new capital at Nineveh, and by the destruction and sack of Babylon. The common element is water: water creates Assyria's abundance through the king's ingenuity, but is also used by the king to destroy the enemies of the state. The *salmu* of these facets of Sennacherib's kingship is therefore carved into the living rock above the very conduit at which water is siphoned off the Gomel and falls into the technological manipulation of the king's aqueduct system.

[446] I owe this initial observation to a remark made by Rabun Taylor in conversation, October 2011.

Conclusion

With this understanding of both the inscription and the Great Relief, we can approach the site of Khinnis as an integrated rhetorical image of Sennacherib's monarchical ideology. The site has several important elements: the king niches in the cliff above, three of which are inscribed over the entrance, exit, and functional center of the site, the Gate Relief weir block serving to mark the exact point where the waters of the Gomel are directed into the aqueduct and diverted, and the Great Relief carved above this same fulcrum.

As Shafer argues, the king niches appear to delineate Khinnis as a conceptual whole created by Sennacherib, marking the space in which the site performs its function as well as ensuring that the king's *salmu* is present to witness its functioning. The imagery of the Gate Relief, containing bull colossi arranged on either side of a frontal *lahmu* figure, clearly references the heraldic compositions which adorn the entrances of the Assyrian palaces, as the weir block marks the portal through which the waters will enter and water Sennacherib's Assyria.[447] The frontal figures of the end relief, portraying Aššur flanked by the duplicated king, face towards the direction from which the water originates, and the two kings might be associated with the diverted stream: one "civilized" by the king's technical power to water the heartland and capital, the other flowing back into the wilderness, a possible echo of the dualism that is present in so many of Sennacherib's works.

[447] As noted in Chapter 2, the site was in fact referred to as the *bāb nāri* or "Gate of the Canal" in Sennacherib's inscriptions. The notion that the water enters through the weir into the "palace" of Assyria gives seems to be an especially appropriate image for a king who "makes Assyria" in his titulary.

The notion that Khinnis serves as a kind of "palace gate" for Assyria is implied not only by the direct quotation of palatial entrances on the Gate Relief block but also in the compositional similarities between the Great Relief and emblematic palace images such as the sacred tree. As discussed in Chapter 3, the palace of Aššurnasirpal II repeated this central image both behind the throne and opposite the throneroom door, associating it directly with the king and palace entrance. A similar dynamic may be at work at Khinnis, as the Great Relief would immediately "confront" the waters entering the aqueduct. To what extent the Great Relief would have confronted human viewers is another important question, and given the enormous energy poured into such a vast monument Bachmann's contention that the site served as a kind of water park or royal retreat seems plausible.[448] As Wilkinson et al. argue, such sites must have had offtakes, where those who wished to use the canal's waters would have likewise been confronted with legitimating royal emblems. The commemorative function of the Great Relief was paramount, however, especially given that the construction of the Khinnis canal was the culmination of the king's irrigation projects. The Great Relief's spectacular size appropriately captures the grandeur that Sennacherib and his government no doubt felt the undertaking was imbued with, and, like the older peripheral monuments situated at water sources, served to signal the king's role as source of Assyria's abundance.[449]

The telling differences that distinguish the Great Relief from older rock reliefs like those at the Tigris Tunnel, including vast size and novel imagery, proclaim that this

[448] One might think, for example, of the artificial landscapes of the *kirimahhu* discussed in Chapter 2. Shafer, "Carving," 288 n. 66, also writes that there is independent evidence for the existence of such landscaped parks, specifically in the palace reliefs of Aššurbanipal.
[449] Shafer, "Carving," 97.

commemoration occurs in a new imperial context, during a period in which the Assyrian empire was the most powerful state on earth, and for a water source created by the king himself. In the Khinnis inscription Sennacherib rhetorically represented his achievements as a re-founding of the empire and the materialization of a new conception of Assyrian kingship. Acts such as the transformation of Nineveh, the enrichment of the heartland through vast irrigation projects, and the annihilation of the only other political entity with any claim on Mesopotamian hegemony all confirmed that a new kind of king was now ensconced within the "Palace Without Rival." This was not simply a change of priorities; it was a potent reimagining of the very nature of Assyrian monarchy, one that looked to the king's benevolent rule and technocratic expertise for legitimacy. Most importantly, it claimed for the Assyrian king a new royal prerogative to shape the very land itself for the benefit of the state, a level of cosmological control to match Sennacherib's presentation of the unrivalled political position of the Assyrian empire.

The Great Relief is thus a fundamentally *ideological* monument, and by examining it we can gain insight into the nature of this new vision of kingship. Jennifer Ross has defined ideology as "a collection of strategies and shared meanings deployed by an elite class [or person] to make present realities…appear natural and beneficial to society as a whole." Ideology, at its most basic, is the processing of reality into an image.[450] In Assyria, the royal image served especially to convey state ideology, and worked to construct the institution of kingship itself.[451] It is therefore important to

[450] Ross, 328, 333.
[451] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 95.

approach royal imagery not simply as obscuring propaganda, but rather as "rhetorical discourse with distinct social interests." Ideological representation constructs meaning, and the cultural framework within which concepts such as authority, legitimacy, and their correct operation are understood.[452] And as Russell has observed, Sennacherib clearly believed that "readable images" were far more likely to convey his message than texts.[453] Social emblems such as the Great Relief mark what is culturally important; at Khinnis, Sennacherib created a new argument for the social cohesion of his empire.

This *salam šarrutiya*, the "image of kingship" which Sennacherib created in the Great Relief, focuses on the dual royal functions of nurture and control, the propagation of Assyria's interests and the "felling" of its rivals', brought about through the person of the king. It is a heraldic meeting of Mukerji's notions of strategic and logistical control, a theme repeated in numerous contexts within the "Palace Without Rival." Moreover the monarch's agency, as textually and visually portrayed within the specific context of Khinnis, operates through his ingenious ability to manipulate water, one of the most powerful elemental forces of the Mesopotamian cosmos. Like the confrontation of the gods on the Great Relief, the juxtaposed images of Nineveh and Babylon in the inscription reflect the king's ability to use this force for creation and destruction.[454] Gone are the days when the kings of Assyria and Babylon could meet as colleagues on the

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[452] Harmanşah, 197, 183.

[453] Russell, *Palace Without Rival*, 264.

[454] A modern analogue for this notion of the state's ability to harness natural forces for both creation and destruction might be the use of nuclear power. Nuclear fission can generate vast amounts of relatively cheap and clean energy for the population as a whole. Yet it also has a devastating destructive power, which not only annihilates the enemy and their cities but also kills the very landscape itself. Even when used peacefully, the double face of this power contains the latent threat of accident or meltdown.

throne base of Shalmaneser III; within Sennacherib's rhetoric, the destruction of one implies the flourishing of the other. That the king used water to do so confirms the universal powers which Assyrian kings claimed in their titularies. In Sennacherib's re-imagining of Assyrian dominion, water and the very landscape itself serve the Land of Aššur, and the configuring of such landscapes became "a part of the apparatus of power."[455]

Yet Sennacherib did not simply create such images of kingship out of thin air. Both the rhetorical claims made in the inscription and the anthropomorphic figures of the Great Relief originate in older traditions of royal self-presentation and divine imagery. In fact, the ruler's claim to create abundance is perhaps the oldest of all legitimating tropes, and the iconography of state-created fertility is coeval with the existence of the state itself.[456] That the Khinnis aqueduct was constructed to manipulate and utilize the watery force of abundance for Assyria both confirmed Sennacherib's fulfillment of this ancient role and magnified it to a new imperial scale. The successful creation of infrastructure signified that Assyria was in harmonious accord with the forces of nature, an ideal situation in which "society did not set out upon its enterprises in hazardous isolation but…was carried forward by a current of immeasurable potency."[457]

Indeed, the physical materialization of Sennacherib's irrigation plans, and its commemoration in the massive Great Relief, confirmed the divine powers the king claimed to channel. "Ideology," writes De Marrais, Castillo and Earle in an article on the

[455] Harmanşah, 180.
[456] Winter, "Agrarian," 201; Ross, 329.
[457] Frankfort, 277.

power of objects to communicate ideological messages, "is as much the material means to communicate and manipulate ideas as it is ideas themselves…materialized ideology molds individual beliefs for collective social action."[458] Sennacherib's power to manipulate iconography and emblematic composition in his approach to the Great Relief, the Gate Relief and the king niches was in itself indexical to his ability to shape the landscape to Assyria's needs, and to his prerogative to do so as monarch. In a sense, Alfred Gell observed as much when he wrote, "the court sculptor, by means of his magical power over marble, provides a physical analogue for the less easily realized power wielded by the king, and thereby enhances the king's authority."[459] Yet in Sennacherib's case, the message and the messenger were one: as his carvers arranged figures on the cliff at Khinnis, so did the king ingeniously arrange the Assyrian landscape. The power of one was not "symbolic" for that of the other; they were essentially equivalent. The Great Relief also therefore operates as a kind of "brand" upon the landscape, firmly identifying the arrangement of the site with the originating genius of the king.[460] Its novelty associates it with a monarch who, as we have seen, strove mightily to represent himself as an innovator and problem-solver. It is thus a *salmu* not only in its simulation of the king's presence, but also as a new and unique kind of commemoration, materializing the very qualities enumerated in Sennacherib's rhetorical inscriptions.

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[458] Elizabeth De Marrais et al., "Ideology, Materialization, and Power Strategies," *Current Anthropology* 37 (1996), 16.
[459] Alfred Gell, "The Enchantment of Technology and the Technology of Enchantment," in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. by Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 52
[460] Papalexandrou, 176.

It is important to consider the operative agency of the Great Relief as well, positioned as it was over the Khinnis canal's most sensitive juncture. Irene Winter has argued that the presence of the *salam šarrutiya* had a legitimating function, based on the manner in which the king's *salmu* on the Old Babylonian Stele of Hammurabi (carved over a millennium prior to Sennacherib's lifetime) served to validate the legal verdicts recorded below (fig. 52). Her translation of the relevant portion of Hammurabi's inscription reads: "I have inscribed my word (i.e. the laws) upon my stele (and) established/confirmed/certified it by (i.e. through the witnessing presence of) my image (as) 'king of justice.'"[461] The use of the king's witnessing image to certify the text seems implicit at Khinnis as well, as the Great Relief contains in emblematic format the same layers of connotative meaning stated in the inscription. Hammurabi's *salmu* operates as a physical manifestation of the king's role as just monarch, confirming/certifying this facet of the king's rule as exemplified by his verdicts below. Likewise, the Great Relief functionally confirms/certifies Sennacherib's role as ingenious monarch, able to bend water to serve both the beneficial and destructive needs of the state at the behest of the gods, embodied in the very canal head below the Great Relief. The canal itself is confirmed/certified by the emblem of the king's channeled relationship to the gods (who of course manifested their approval in the opening ceremonies). As Ann Shafer has observed, the Khinnis inscription is closer to palatial texts in emphasizing the permanence and protection of the work rather than the image that commemorated it.[462]

[461] Winter, "Art *in* Empire," 80.
[462] Shafer, "Carving,"

Art thereby becomes a crucial element of the proper, *legitimate* operation of technology.[463]

In discussing the presentation of power within monarchies, Clifford Geertz has written:

> …the easy distinction between the trappings of rule and its substance becomes less sharp, even less real; what counts is the manner in which, a bit like mass and energy, they are transformed into one another…chiefs are changed to rajahs by the aesthetics of their rule.[464]

Sennacherib seems to have been deeply conscious of this aspect of power, for the visual imagery with which he represented his reign reflects a consistent set of priorities and rhetorical tropes within which to couch his rule. Innovation, ingenuity, and the manipulation of landscape and water all appear in the palace reliefs of Nineveh and the rock reliefs of Khinnis and Maltaï. What distinguishes Khinnis, and specifically the Great Relief, is its summary quality. Here, at the physical capstone of Sennacherib's efforts to remake Assyria and Nineveh, he carved an emblematic *salam šarrutiya* which proclaimed his reign as a channeling of nurture and control, the two most fundamental facets of kingship. That Sennacherib intended both he and his successors would reign under this conception of monarchy is implied by the inscription's demand that his sons maintain the aqueduct forever. Within the Great Relief, Sennacherib effectively transformed his kingship into an image that provided the emblematic, symmetrical

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[463] Gell, 43.

[464] Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 124-5.

aesthetic of his rule. His self-presentation as the empire's consolidator has successfully colored perceptions of his reign until the present day.[465]

Beyond creating an emblematic *salmu* of the ideological basis of Assyrian kingship as Sennacherib saw it, the Great Relief also makes a powerful and subtle statement about the nature of monarchy itself. The very function of the Khinnis site – remaking the land and harnessing its waters– points to the "inherent sacredness of sovereign power," the ability of the king and his government to accomplish acts on what could truly be considered a divine scale.[466] This awesome control always has a double aspect, both creative and destructive, which the state employs to foster its own growth or stamp out rival polities. And this dual aspect of power is not limited to Assyria, I would argue, but is characteristic of *all* states that make claim to legitimate authority. Indeed, in many ways, the Assyrian empire "set the pattern" for its successors as rulers of the Near East (Babylon, Persia, and Macedon) as the "originator of the Near Eastern style of empire."[467] The ideological emblems and inscriptions carved at Khinnis, of a king who ruled the Near East over two millennia ago, contain an enduring and subtle message about the nature of power, as relevant now as then.

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[465] See Reade's quote above, .
[466] Geertz, 123.
[467] Postgate, 247.

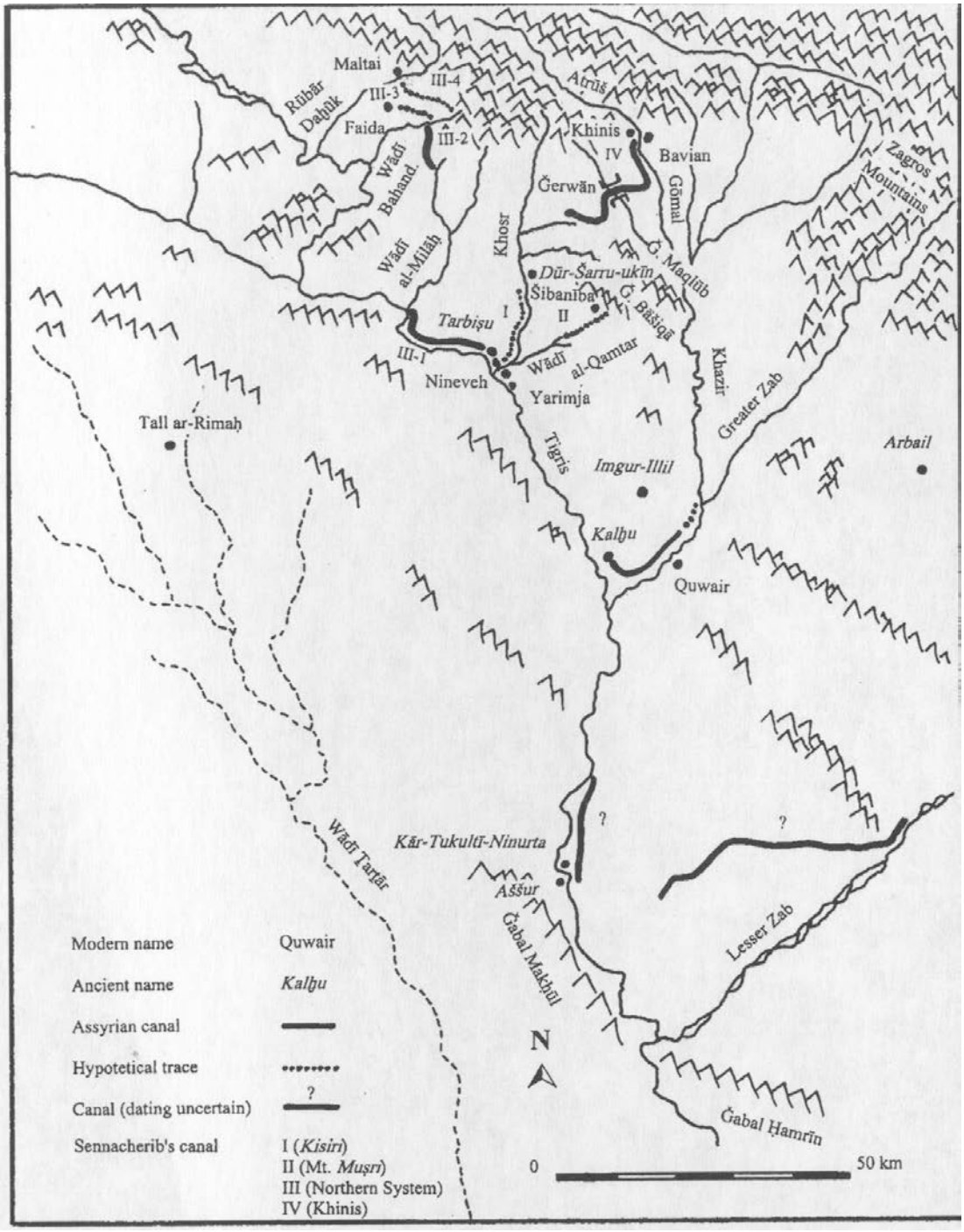

Figure 1: Map of the Assyrian heartland, with the major canals indicated in bold black lines. After Bagg, 2003

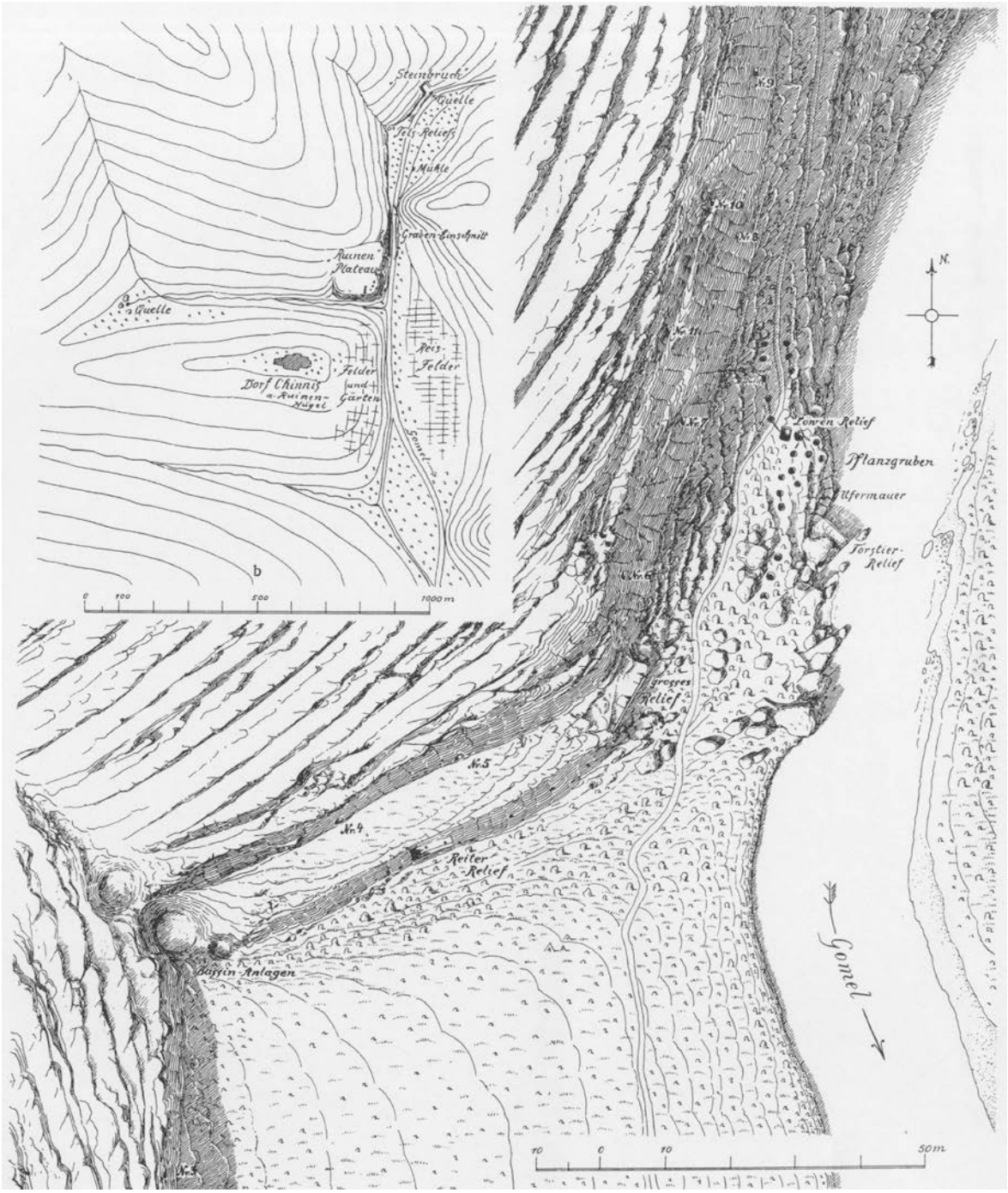

Figure 2: Bachmann's plan of the site of Khinnis, with the Great Relief carved at the point labeled "grossen Relief." After Bachmann, 1927.

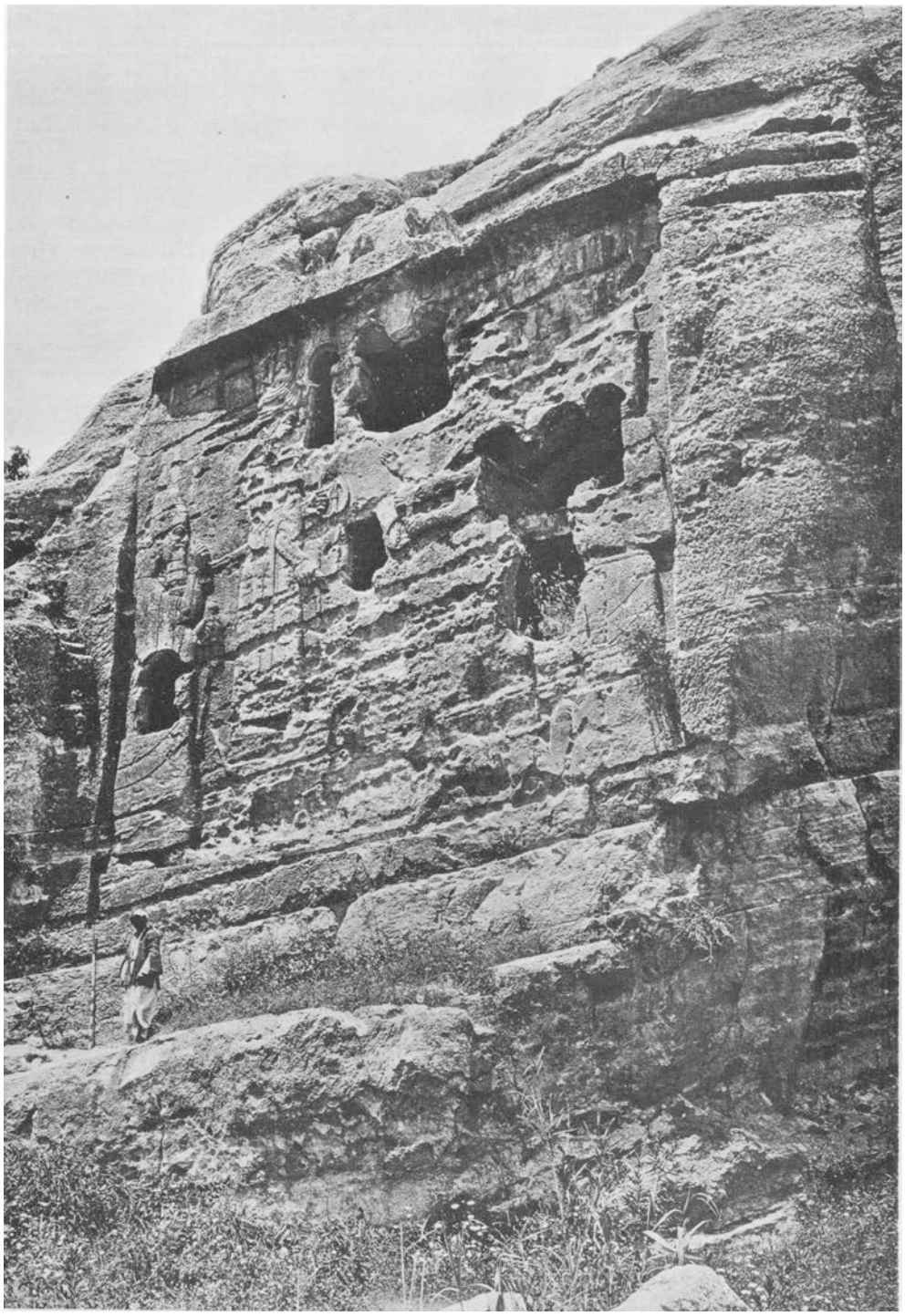

Figure 3: The Great Relief. After Bachmann, 1927.

Figure 4: Diagram of the Great Relief. After Bachmann, 1927.

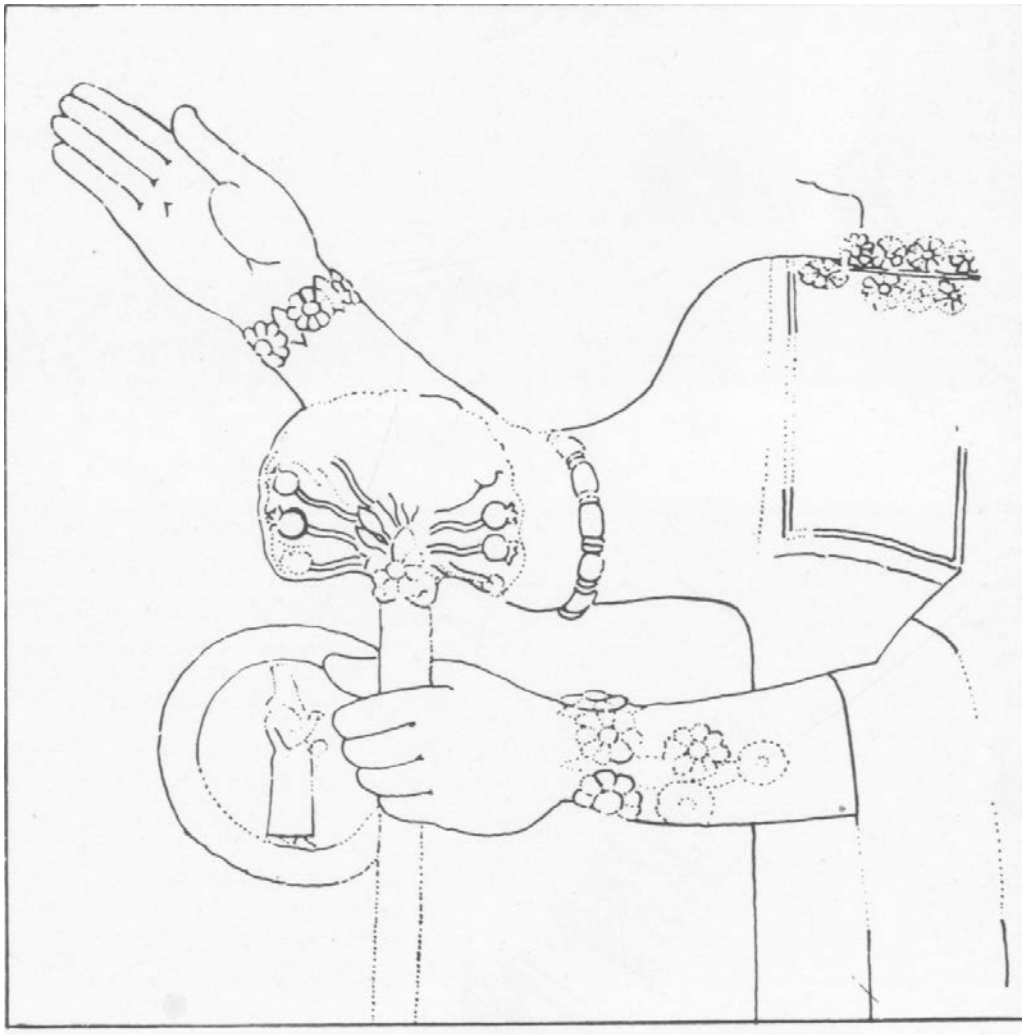

Figure 5: Detail of the vegetal object held by Mullissu. After Bachmann, 1927.

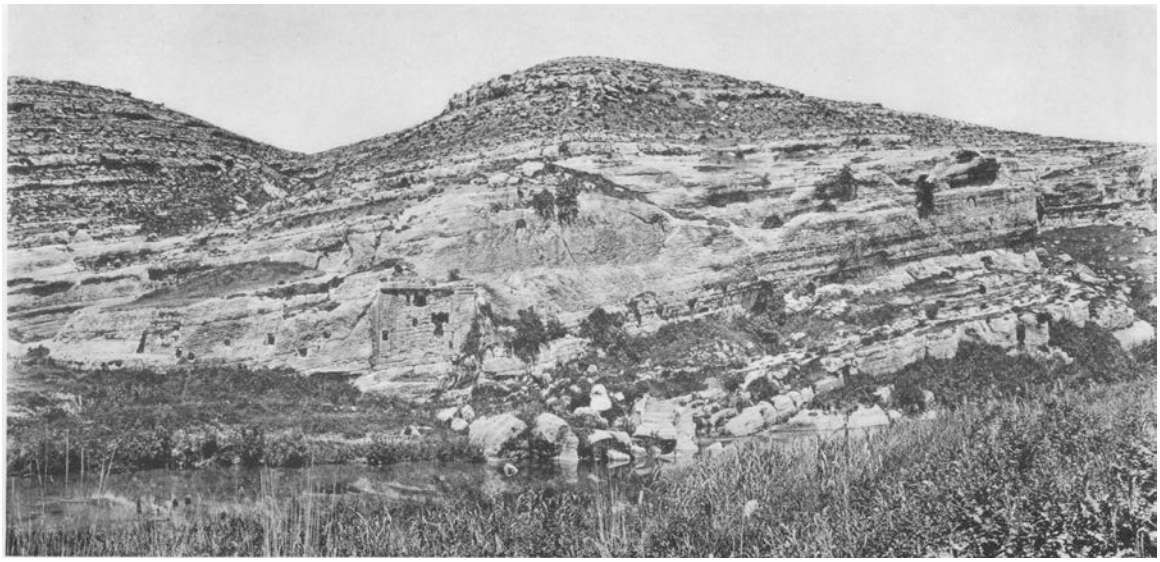

Figure 6: View of Khinnis from the east, with the Great Relief locate left of center. After Bachmann, 1927.

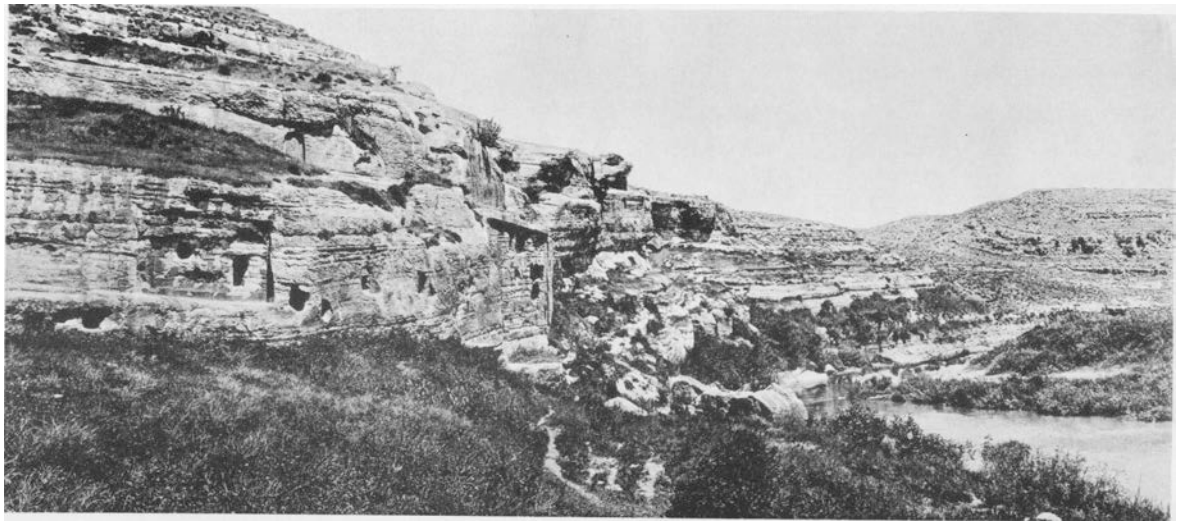

Figure 7: View of Khinnis from the south, with the Great Relief left of center and the Rider Relief at far left. After Bachmann, 1927.

Figure 8: View of the Great Relief and the sculpted weir block, or Gate Relief, at lower left. After Bachmmann, 1927.

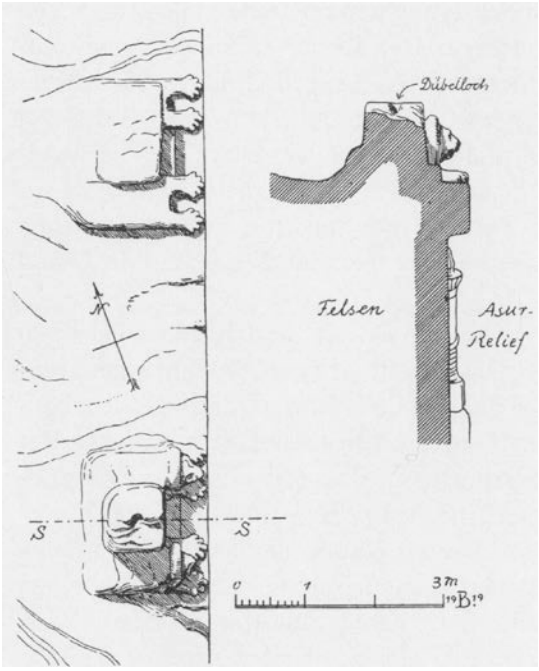

Figure 9: Diagram of the lion posts. After Bachmmann, 1927.

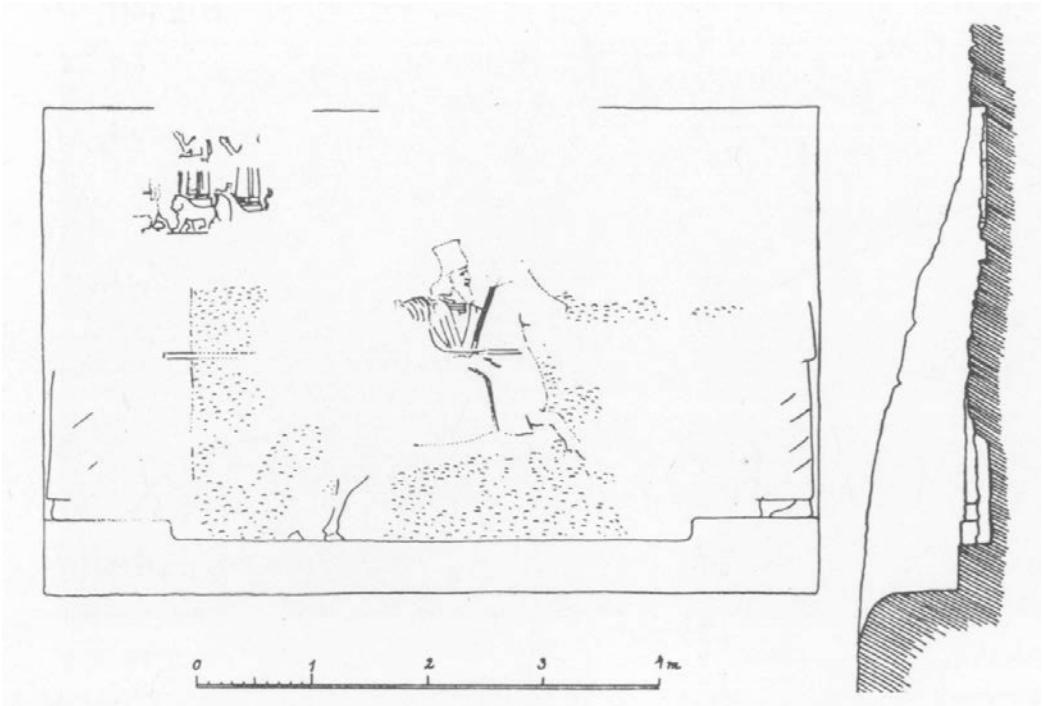

Figure 10: Diagram of the Rider Relief. After Bachmmann, 1927.

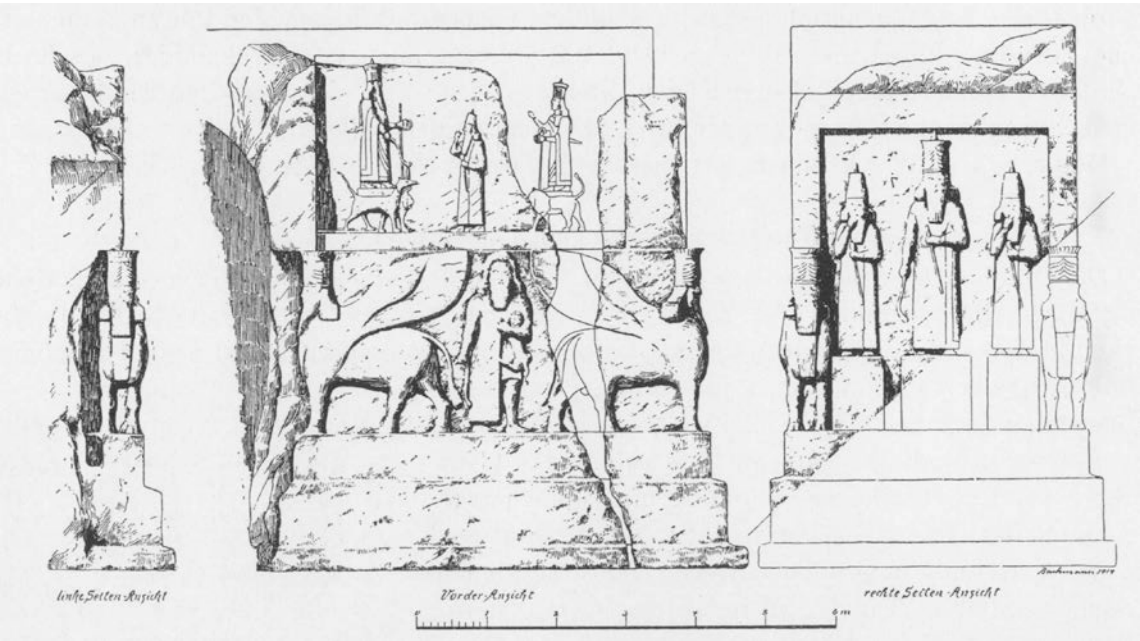

Figure 11: Diagram of the Gate Relief. After Bachmmann, 1927.

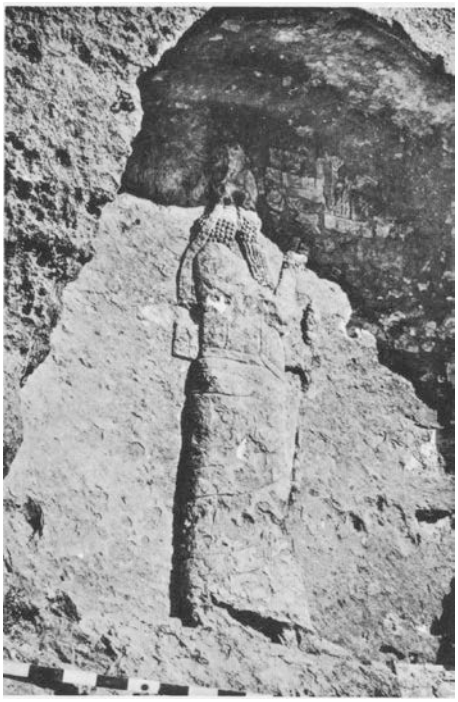

Figure 12: One of the king niches. After Bachmmann, 1927.

Figure 13: Diagram of the king niche. After Bachmmann, 1927.

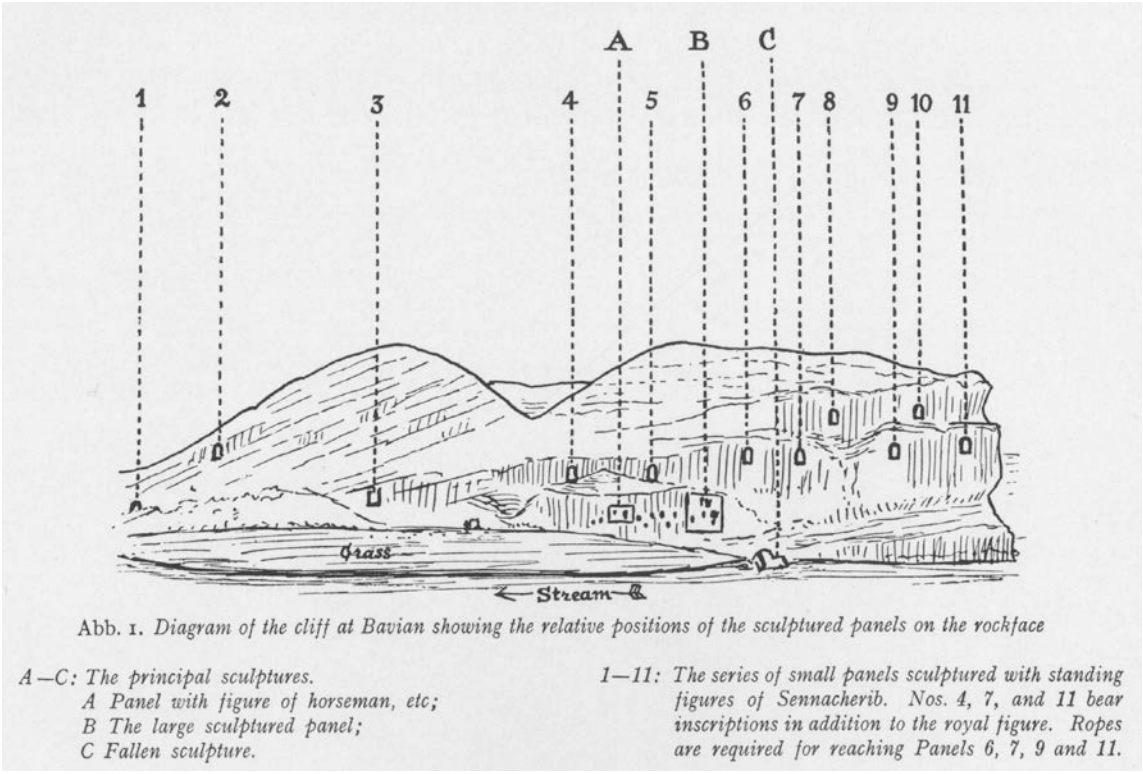

Abb. 1. *Diagram of the cliff at Bavian showing the relative positions of the sculptured panels on the rockface*

A—C: The principal sculptures.
A Panel with figure of horseman, etc;
B The large sculptured panel;
C Fallen sculpture.

1—11: The series of small panels sculptured with standing figures of Sennacherib. Nos. 4, 7, and 11 bear inscriptions in addition to the royal figure. Ropes are required for reaching Panels 6, 7, 9 and 11.

Figure 14: L. W. King's diagram of Khinnis looking from the east. After Bachmmann, 1927.

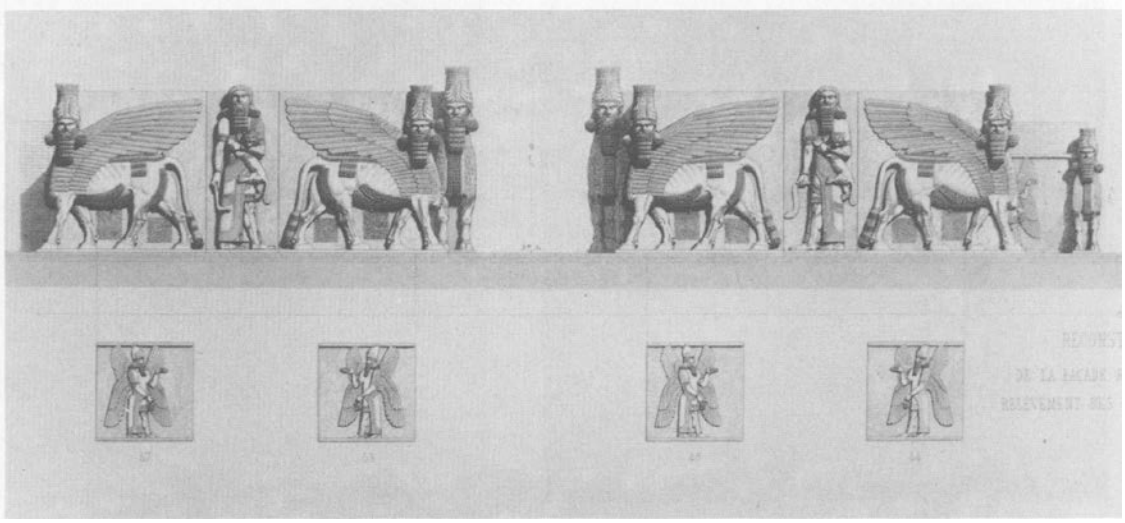

Figure 15: The gateway of Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad. After Russell, 1991.

Figure 16: Bachmann's rendition of how the *Gartental* might have appeared. After Bachmann, 1927.

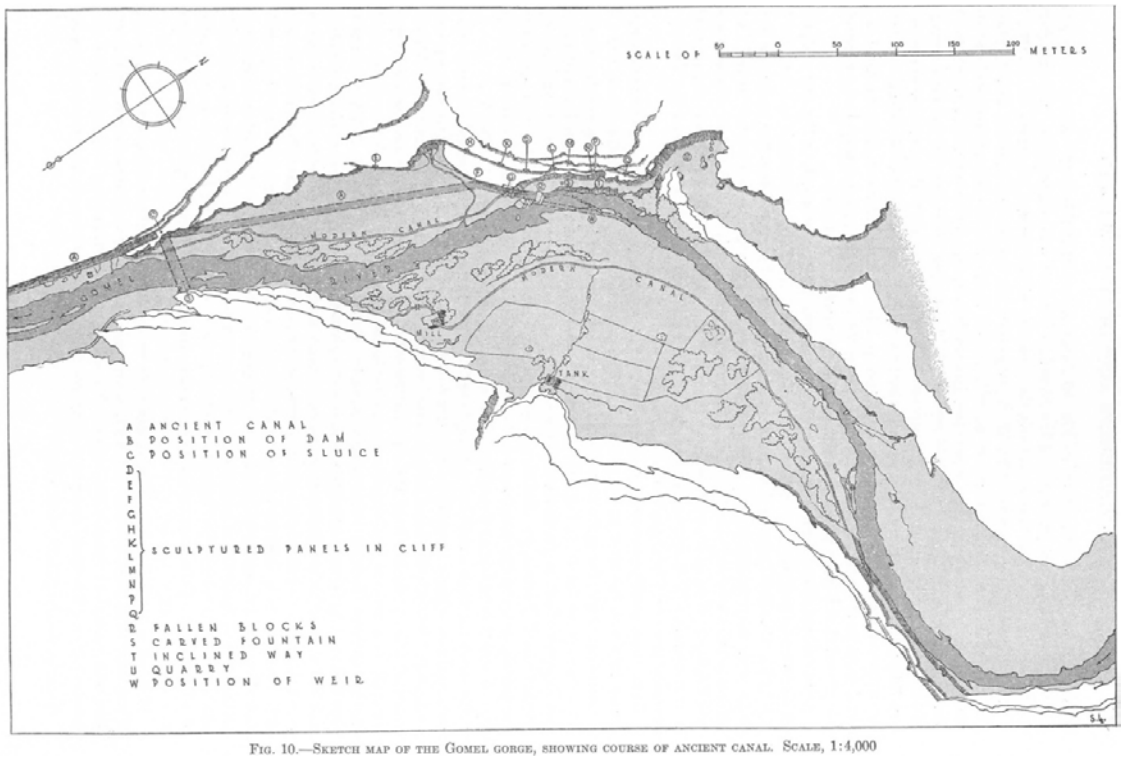

FIG. 10.—SKETCH MAP OF THE GOMEL GORGE, SHOWING COURSE OF ANCIENT CANAL. SCALE, 1:4,000

Figure 17: Diagram of the proposed course of the canal through the Khinnis site, leaving the Gomel under the cluster of reliefs. After Jacobsen and Lloyd, 1935.

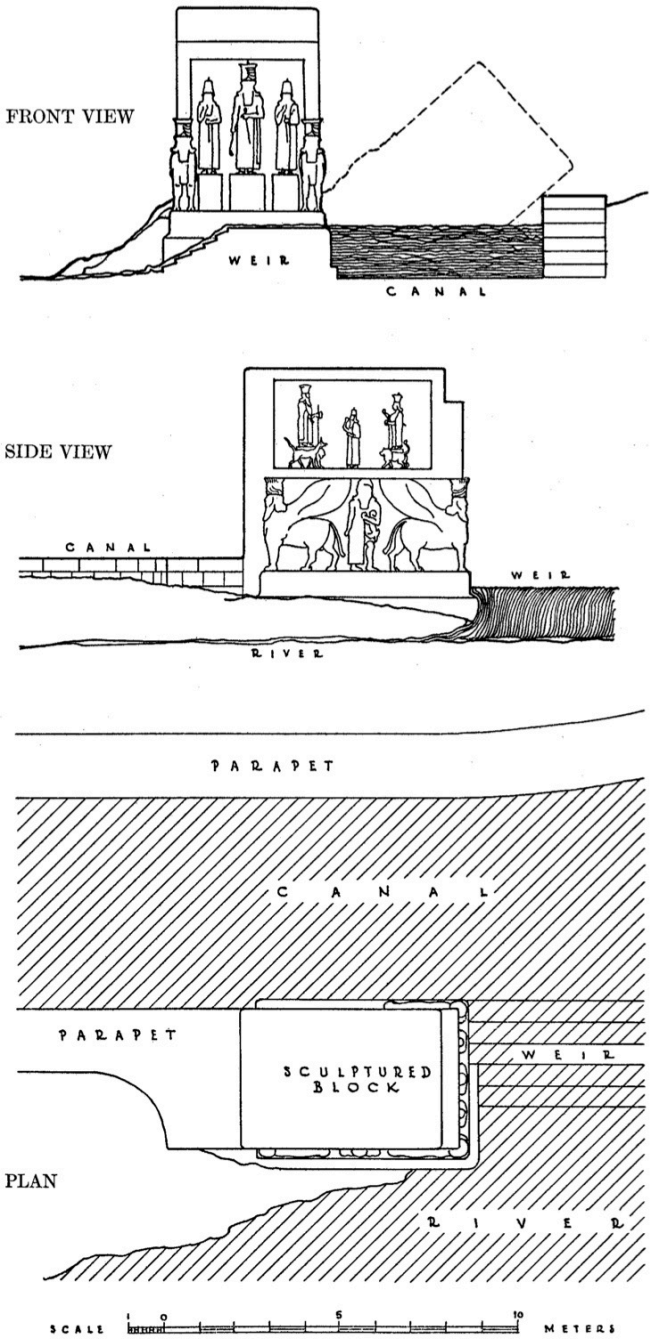

FIG. 12.—TENTATIVE RESTORATION OF THE CANAL HEAD. SCALE, 1:150

Figure 18: Diagram of the Gate Relief's function as a weir for the canal. After Jacobsen and Lloyd, 1935.

Figure 19: King niche 4, which contains fragments of the Khinnis inscription written over the king's figure in the lower half of the image. After Bachmann, 1927.

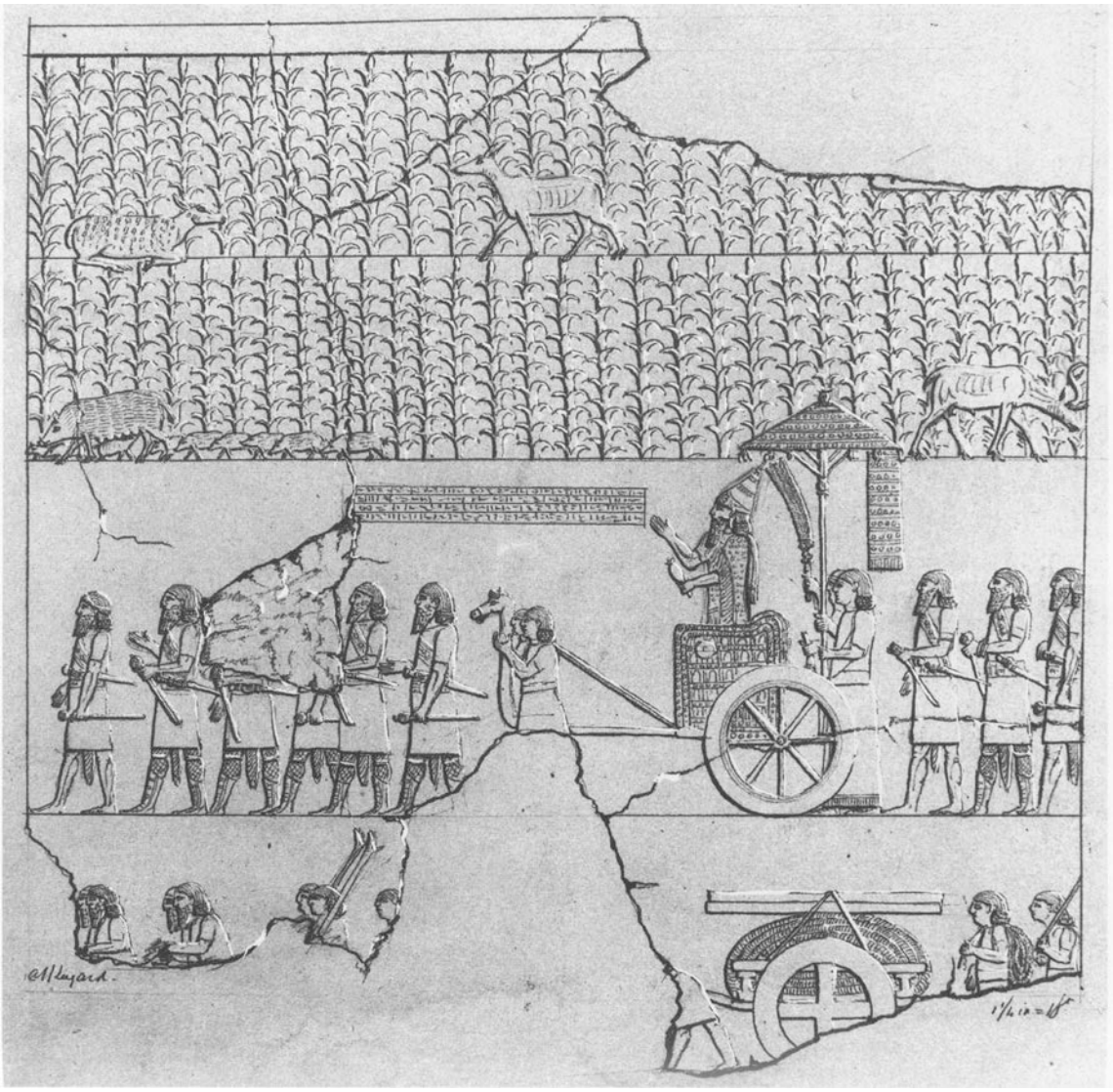

Figure 20: Relief image of Sennacherib travelling through an artificial marsh created near Nineveh. Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 61. After Barnett et al., 1998.

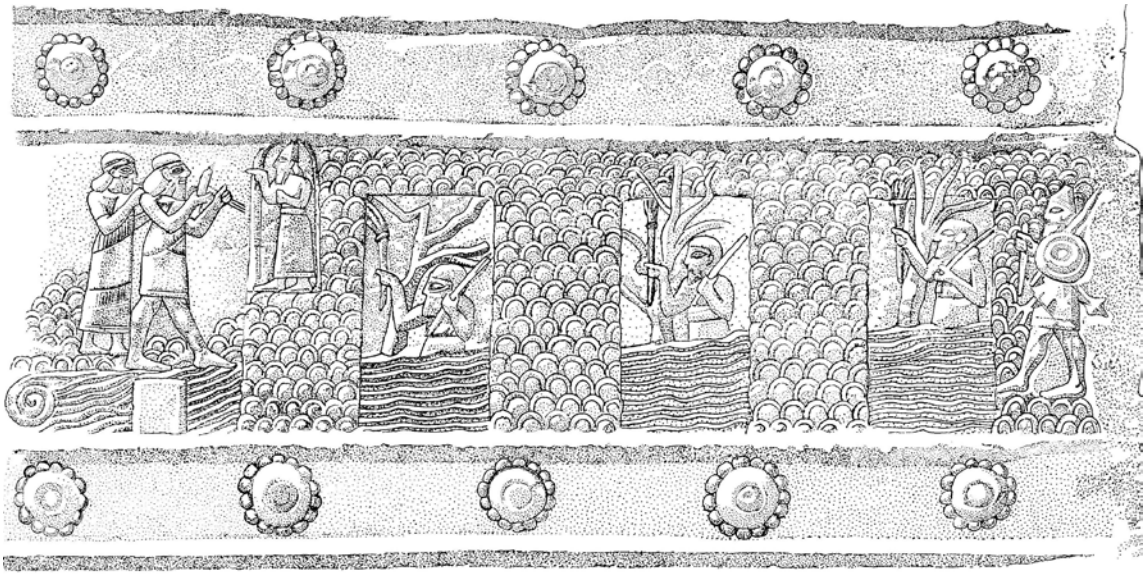

Figure 21: Assyrian workmen carve a peripheral *salam šarrutiya* into the wall of the Tigris Tunnel, on a band from the Balawat Gates. After Börker-Klahn, 1982.

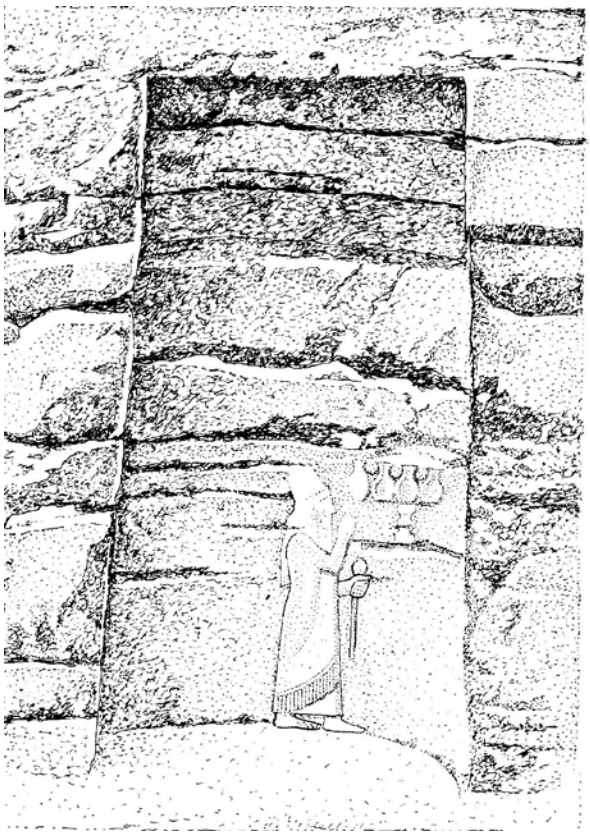

Figure 22: Peripheral monument at Shiru Maliktha. After Börker-Klahn, 1982.

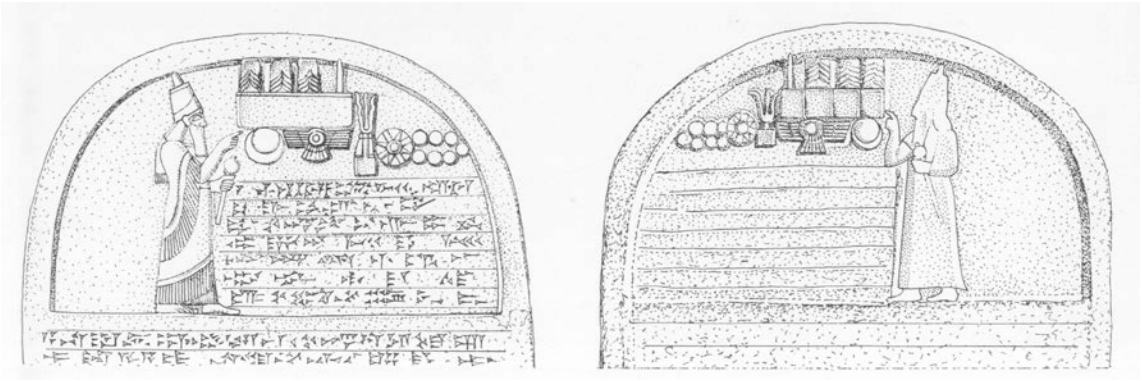

Figure 23: Stelae used to mark the width of Sennacherib's processional roadway throuh Nineveh. After Börker-Klahn, 1982.

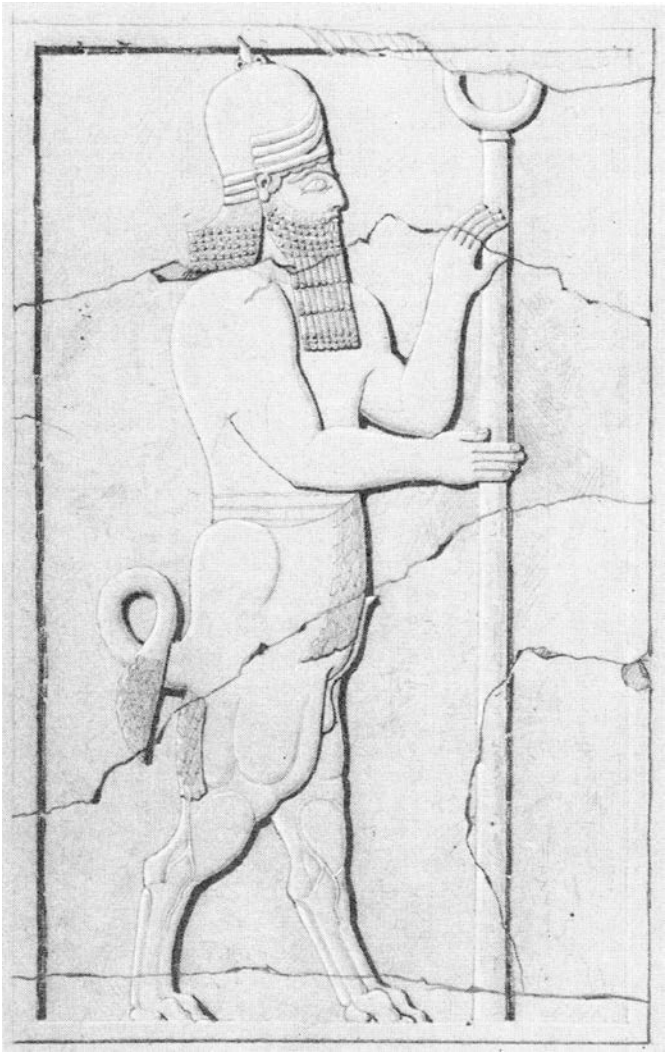

Figure 24: Doorway guardian figure (*uridimmu*). North Palace of Sennacherib's successor Aššurbanipal, Room I, Door *a*, slab 1. After Russell, 1991.

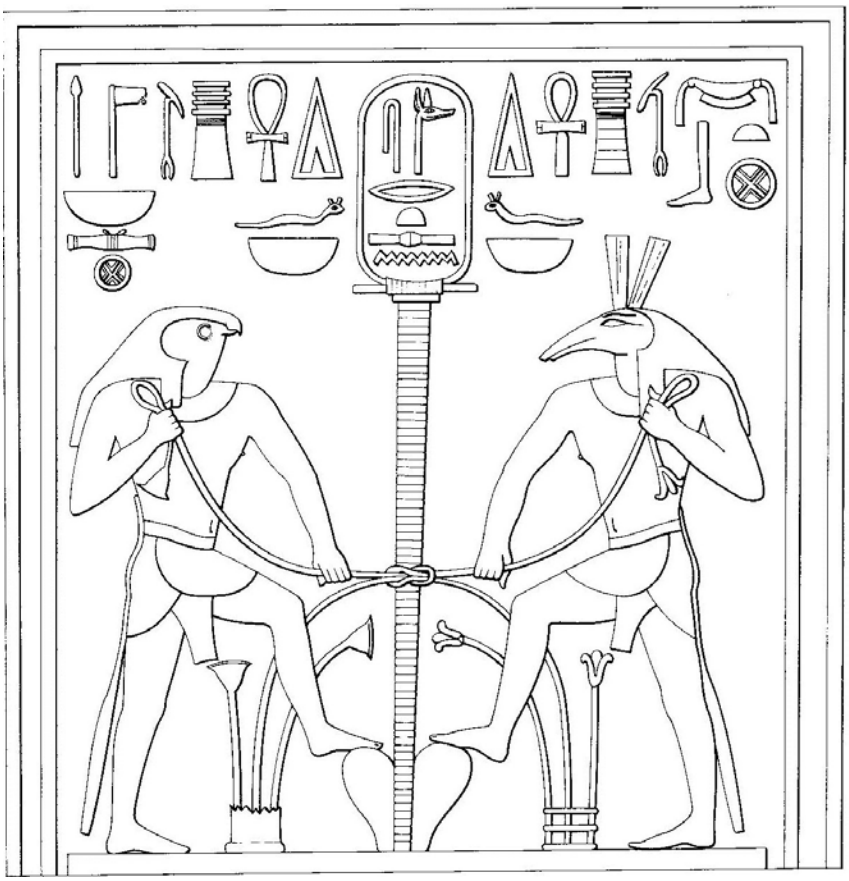

Figure 25: The *sema tawy* emblem. After Kemp, 1989.

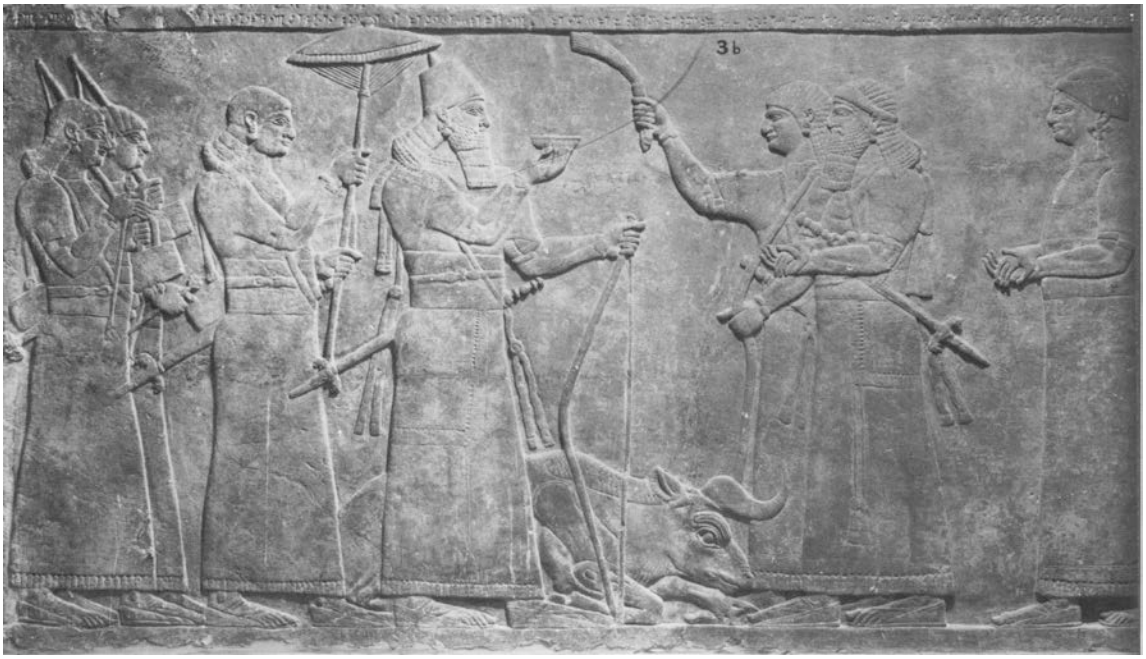

Figure 26: Encounter of the Assyrian king and the official wearing a headband. Palace of Aššurnasirpal II (Tell Nimrud), Room B, slab 20b, 883-859 BCE. Brooklyn Museum, New York. After Paley, 1976.

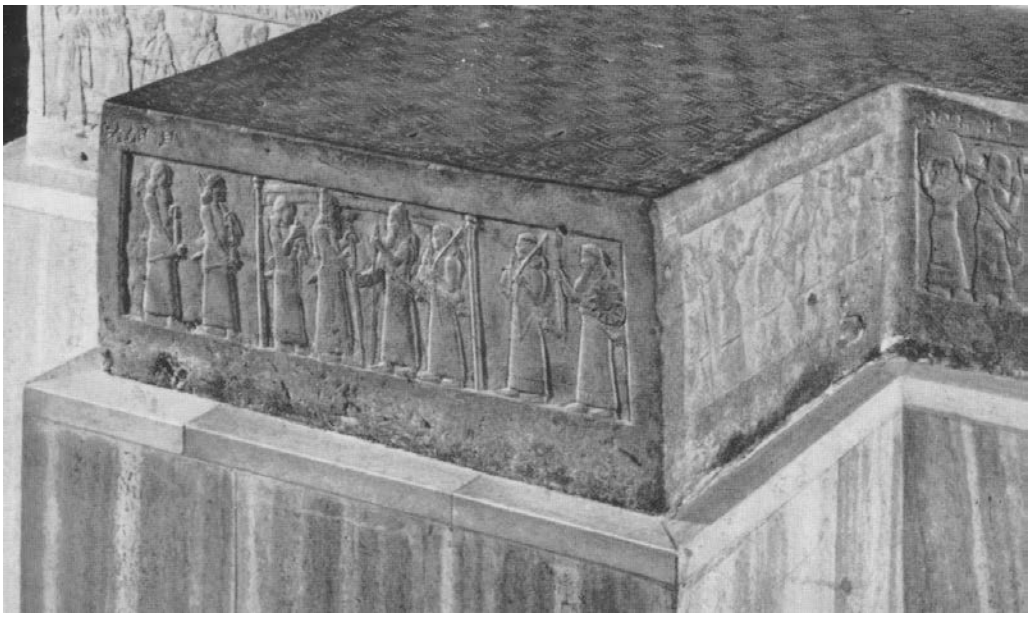

Figure 27: Throne base of Shalmaneser III, 858-829 BCE. Iraq Museum, Baghdad. After Moortgat, 1969.

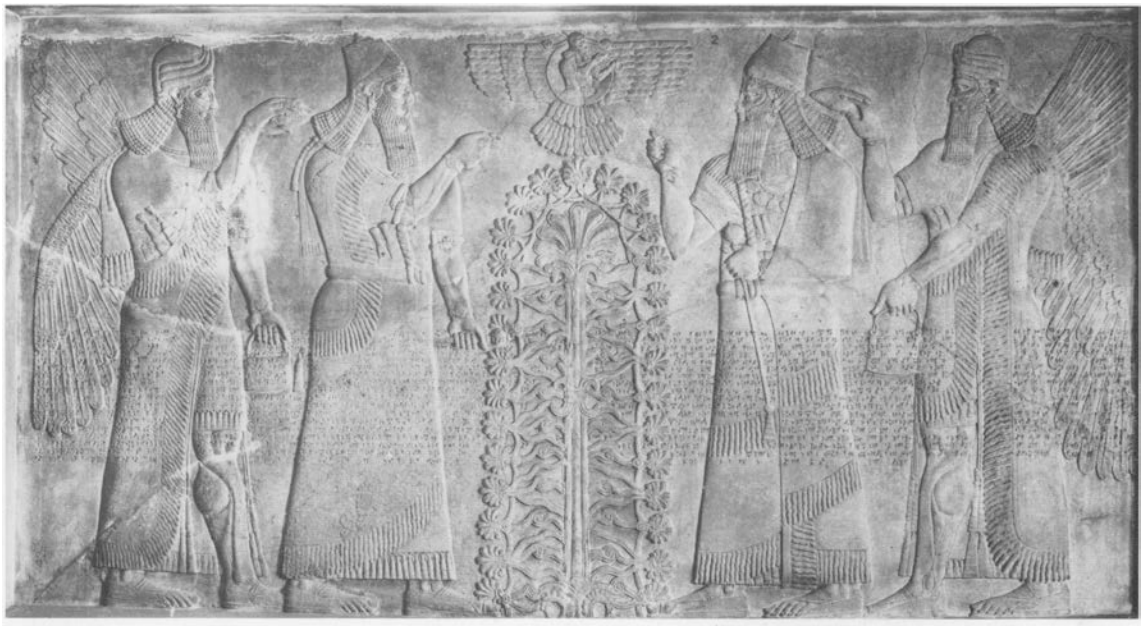

Figure 28: The sacred tree. Palace of Aššurnasirpal II (Tell Nimrud), Room B, slab B23, 883-859 BCE. British Museum, London. After Paley, 1976.

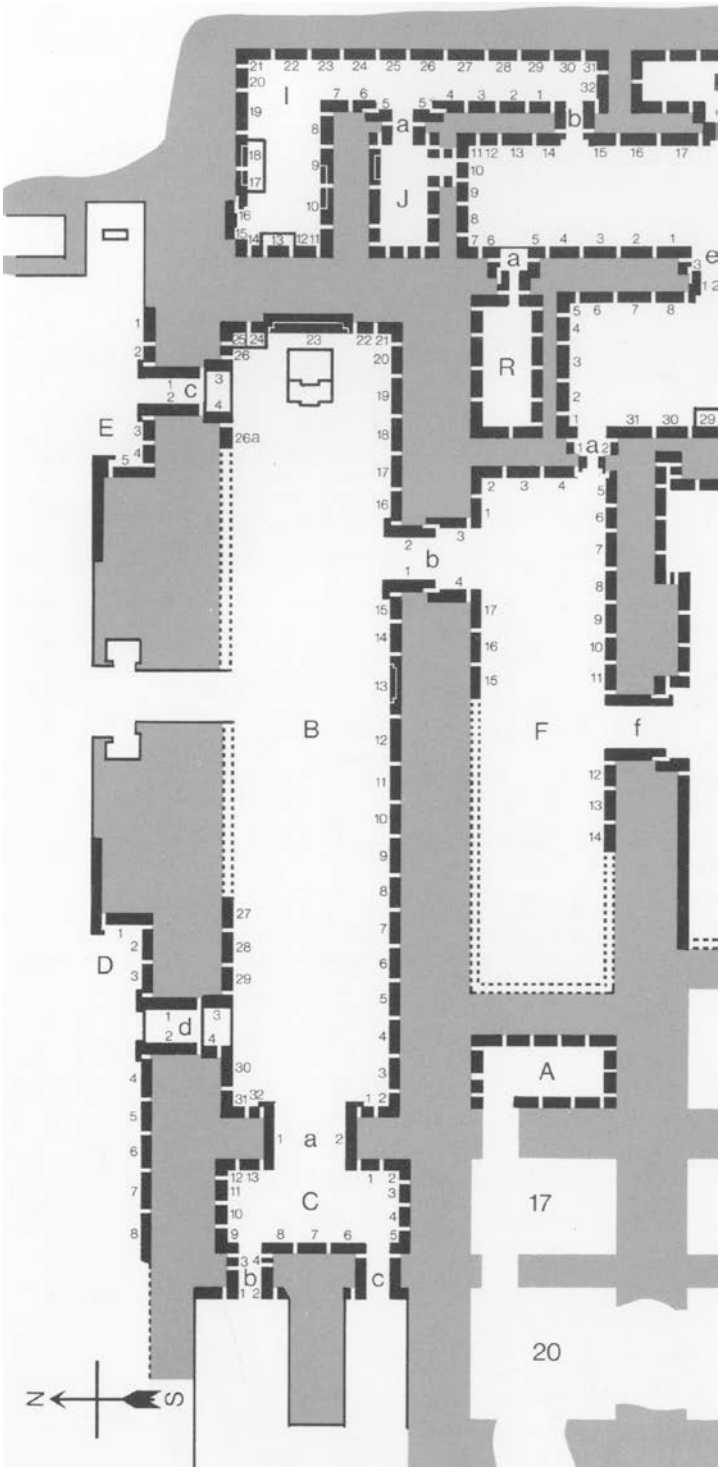

Figure 29: Plan of the throneroom. Palace of Aššurnasirpal II (Tell Nimrud). After Paley, 1976.

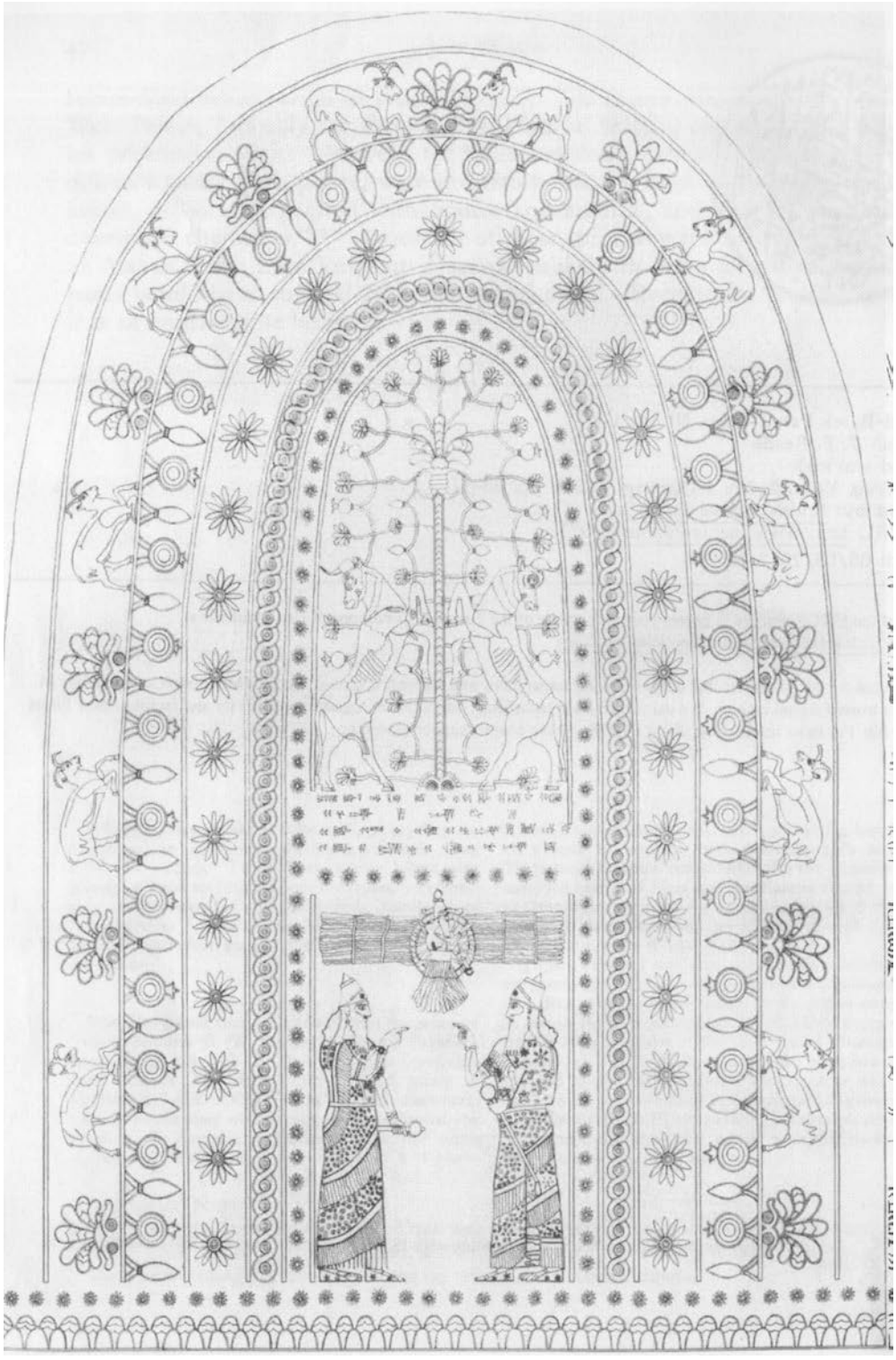

Figure 30: Glazed-brick panel of Shalmaneser III, from Nimrud. After Reade, 1964.

Figure 31: Iterations of the sacred tree. Palace of Aššurnasirpal II (Tell Nimrud), Room I, 883-859 BCE. Brooklyn Museum, New York. After Paley, 1976.

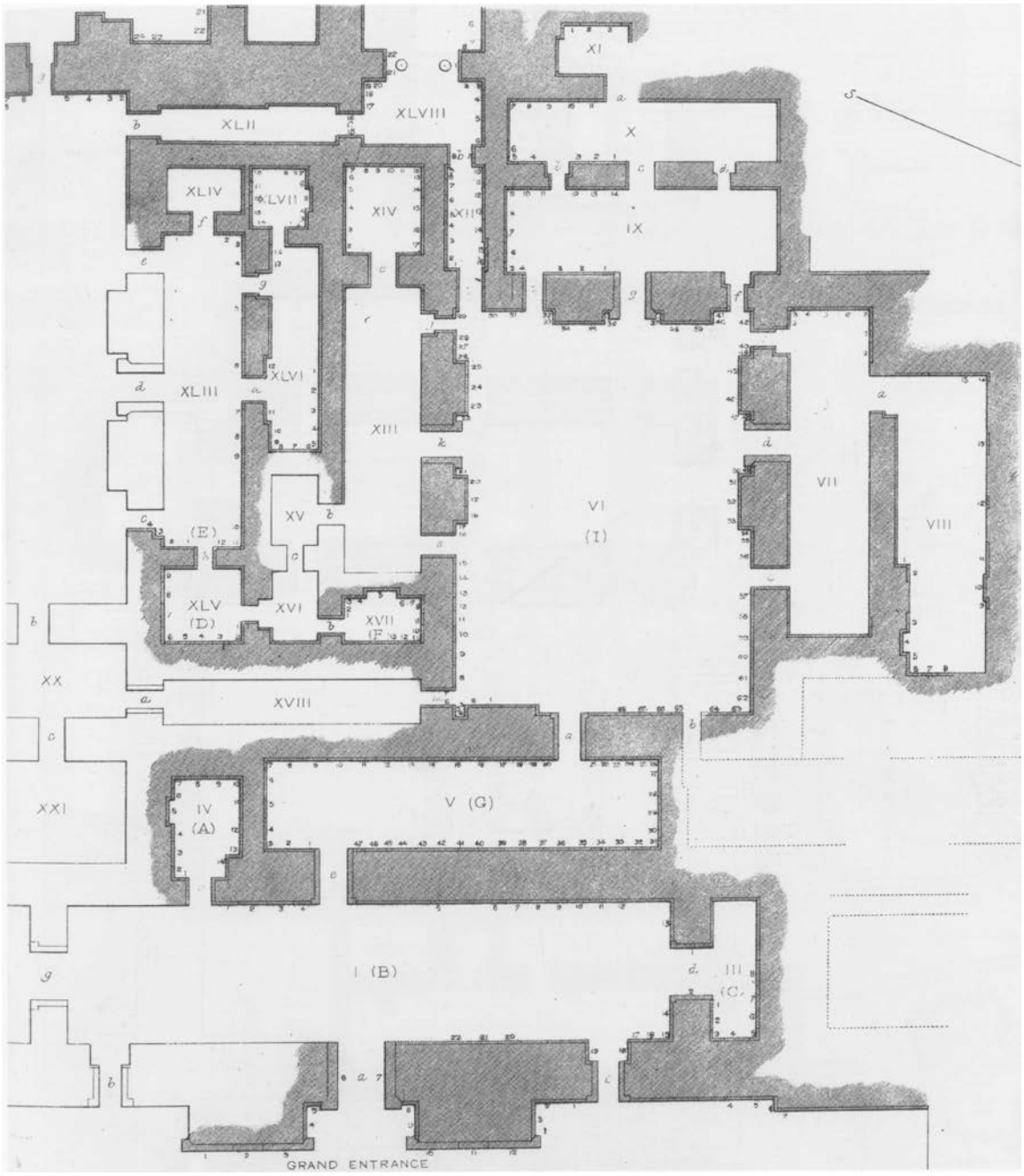

Figure 32: Plan of Sennacherib's "Palace Without Rival," or Southwest Palace, at Nineveh (Koyunjuk). After Russell, 1991.

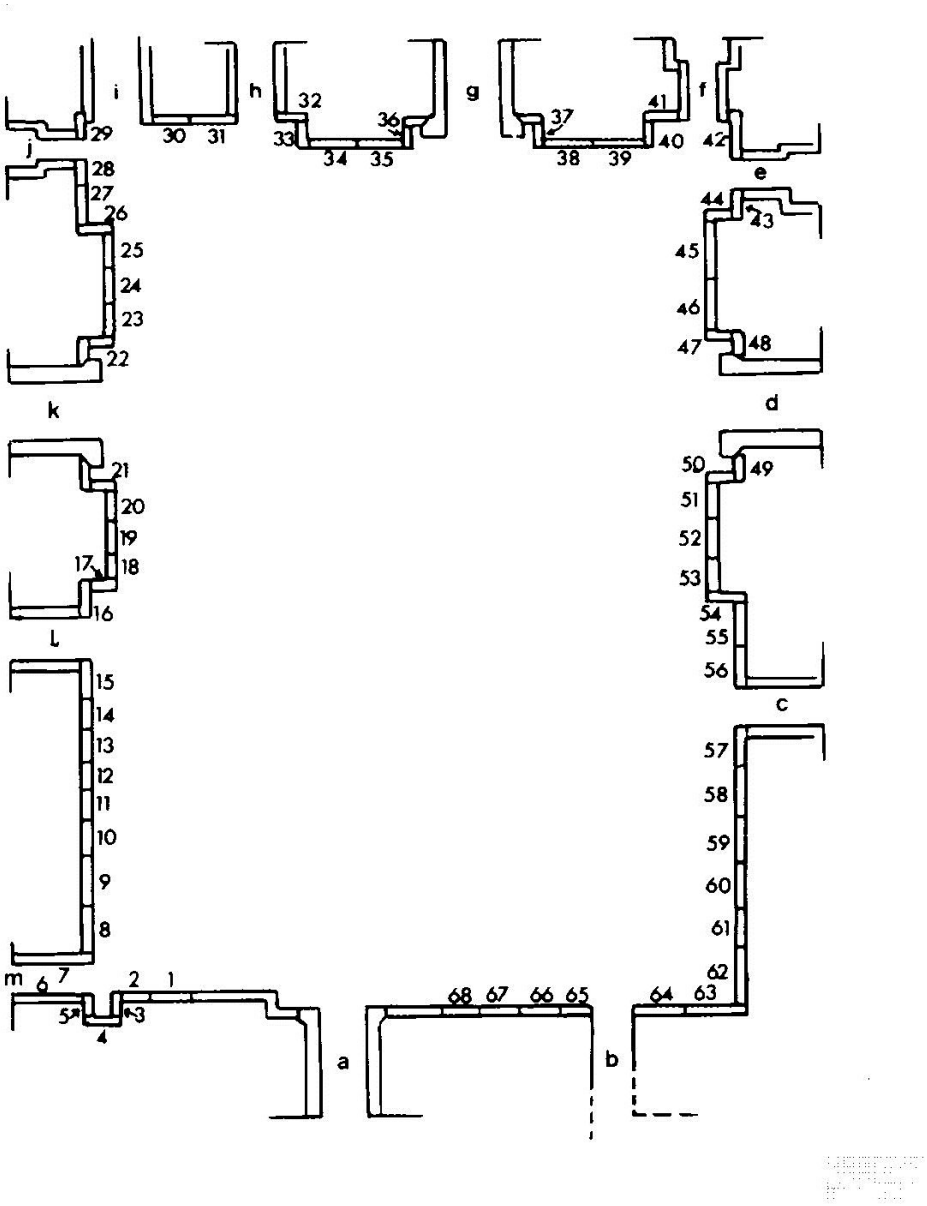

Figure 33: Plan of Court VI from the Palace Without Rival. After Barnett et al., 1998.

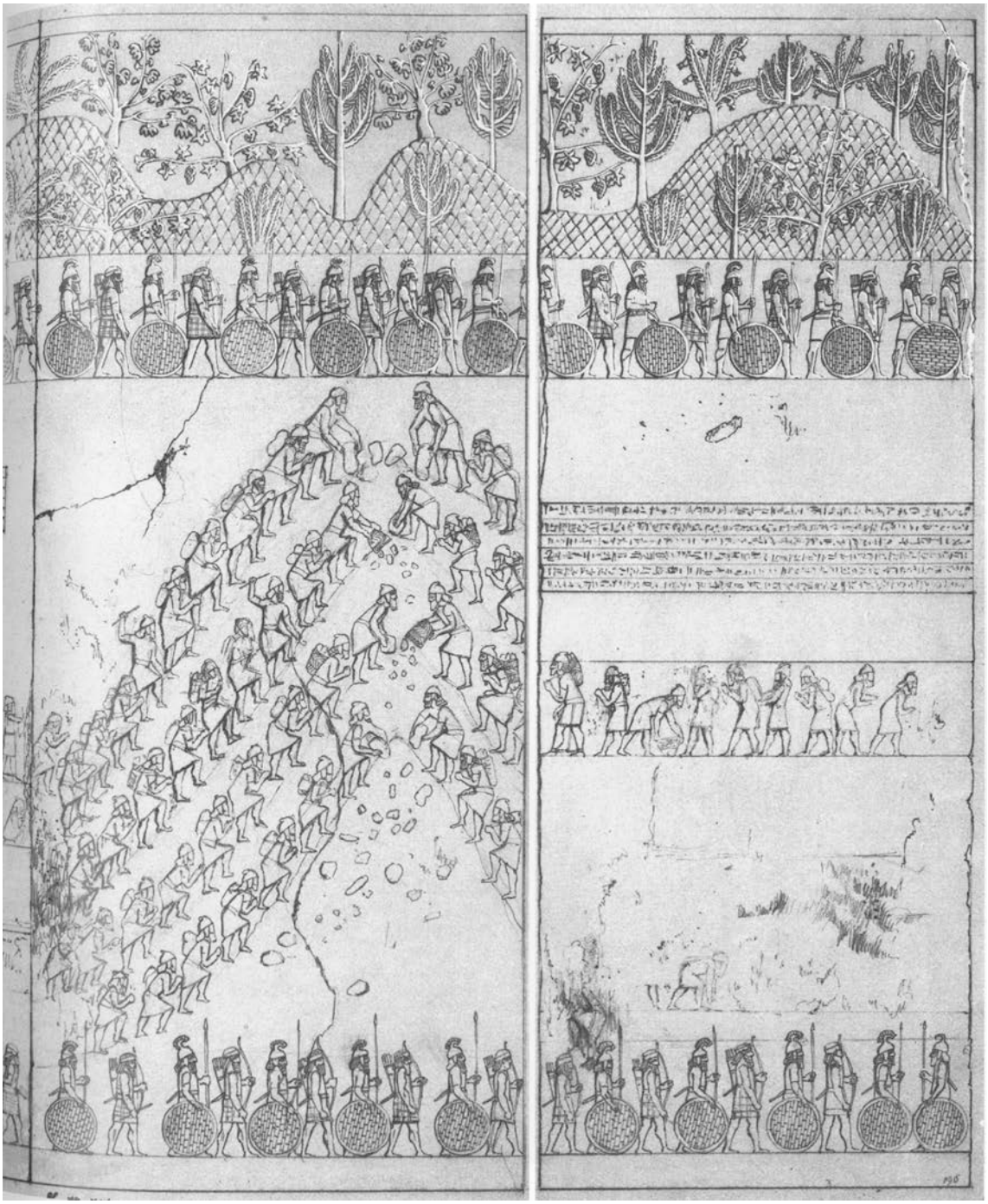

Figure 34: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slabs 67-8. After Barnett et al., 1998.

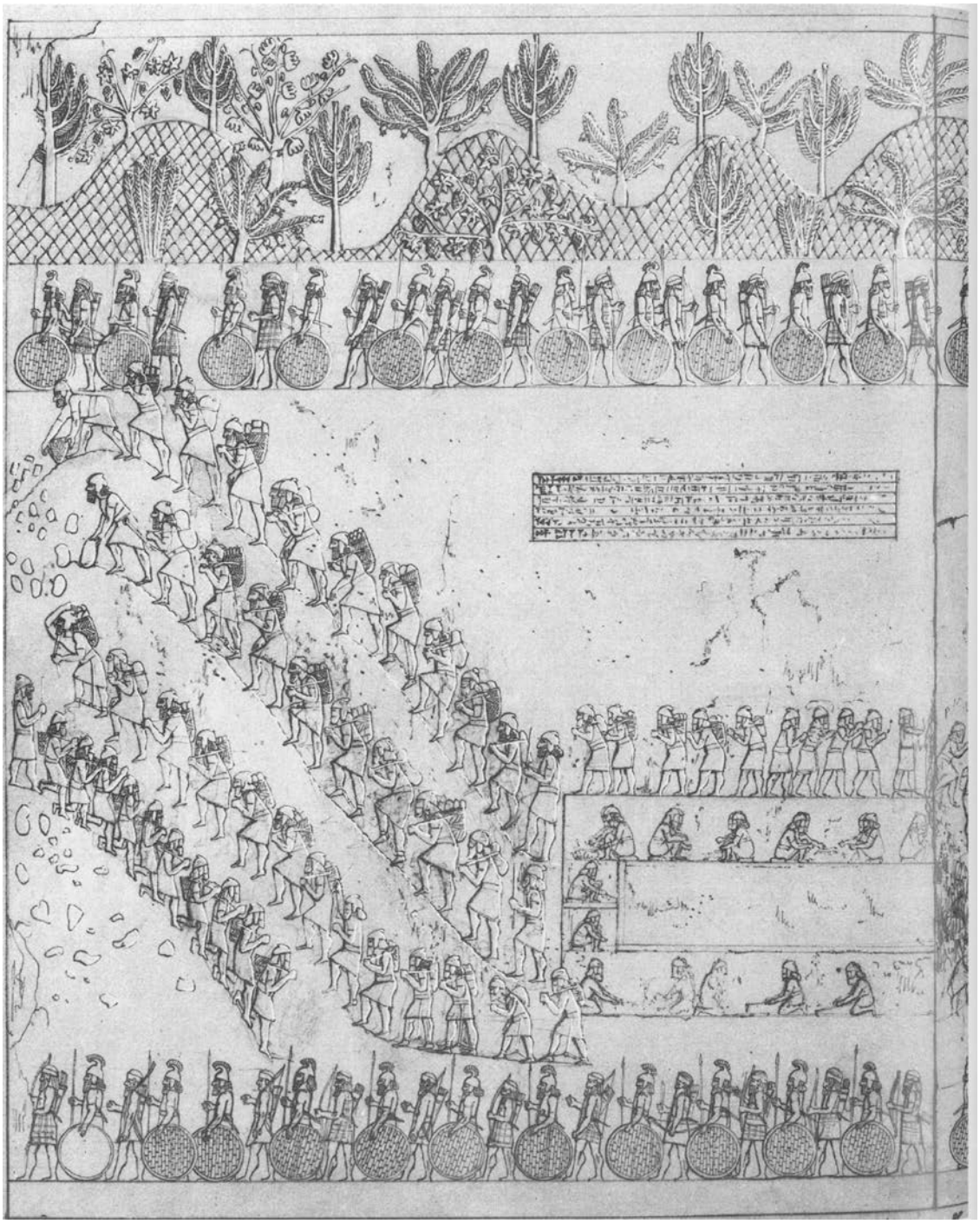

Figure 35: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 66. After Barnett et al., 1998.

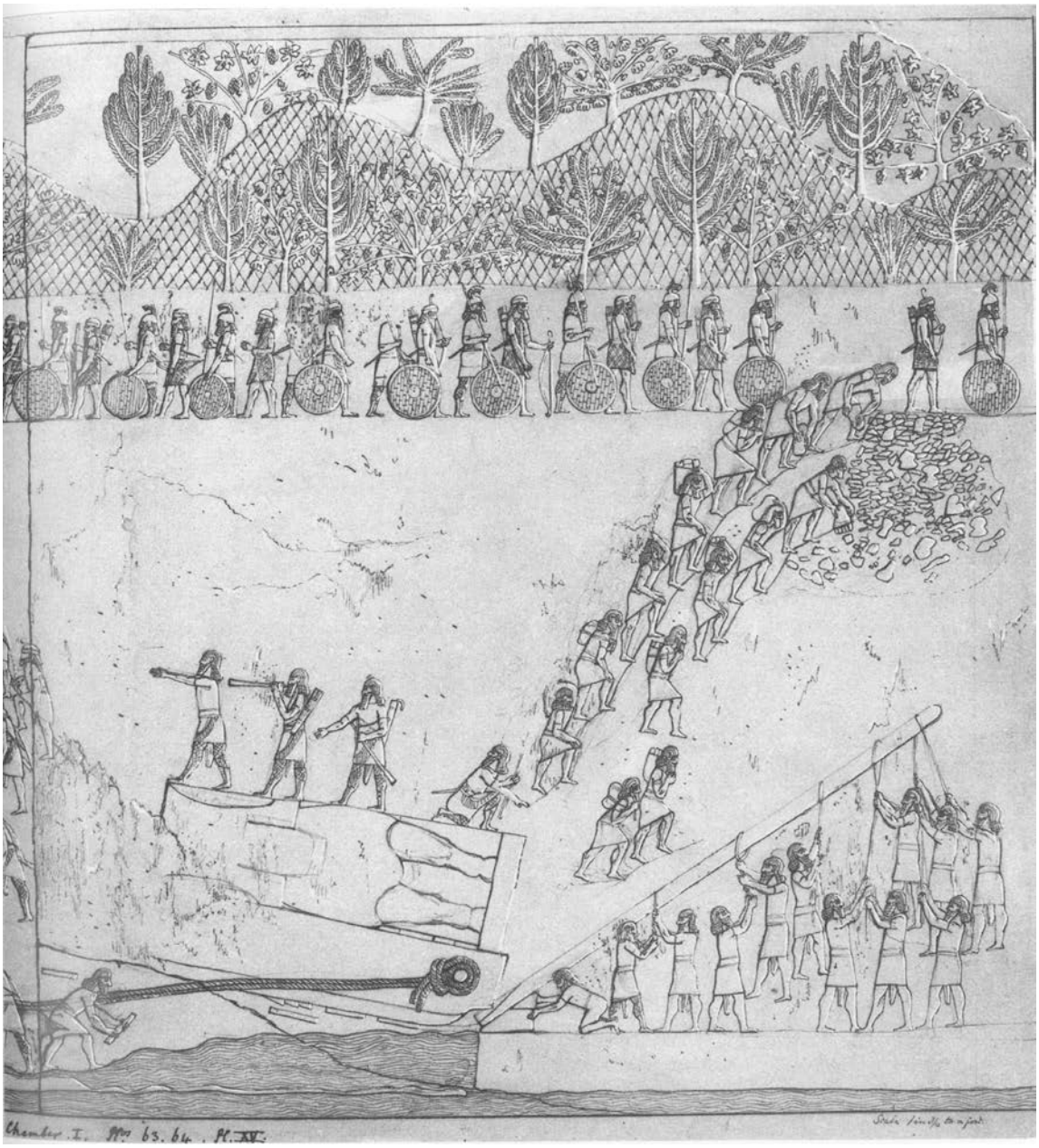

Figure 36: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 65. After Barnett et al., 1998.

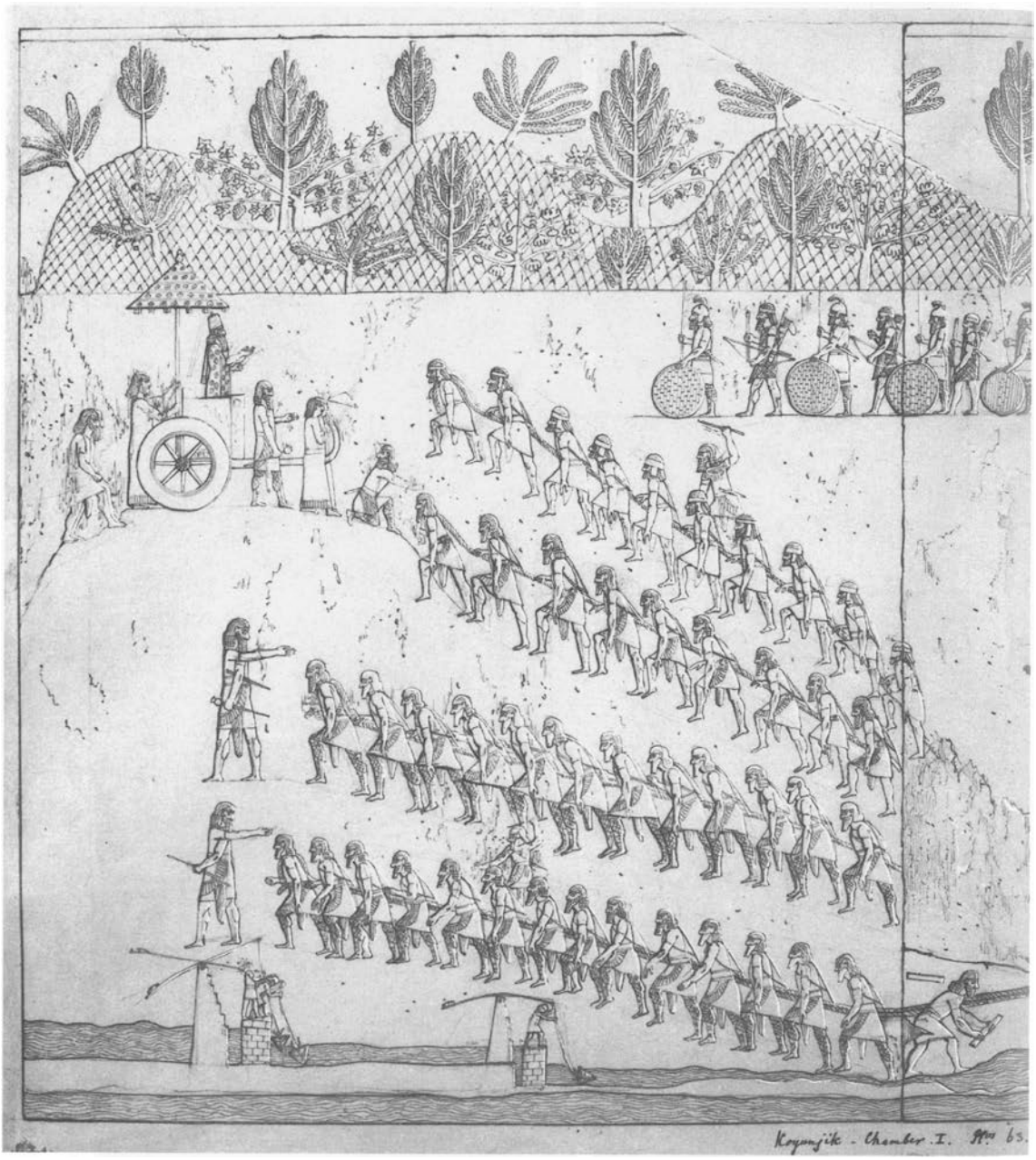

Figure 37: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 64. After Barnett et al., 1998.

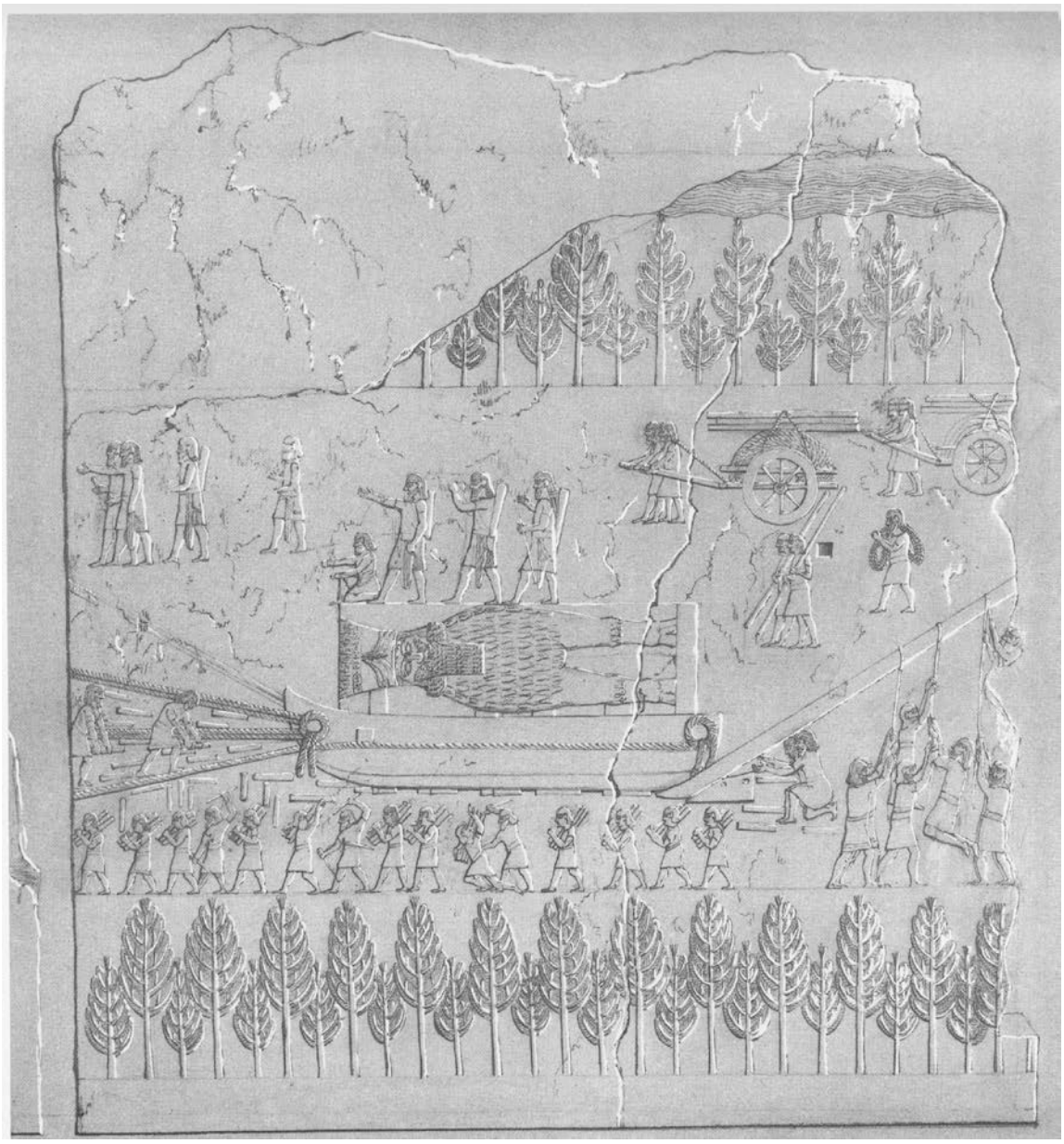

Figure 38: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 56. After Barnett et al., 1998.

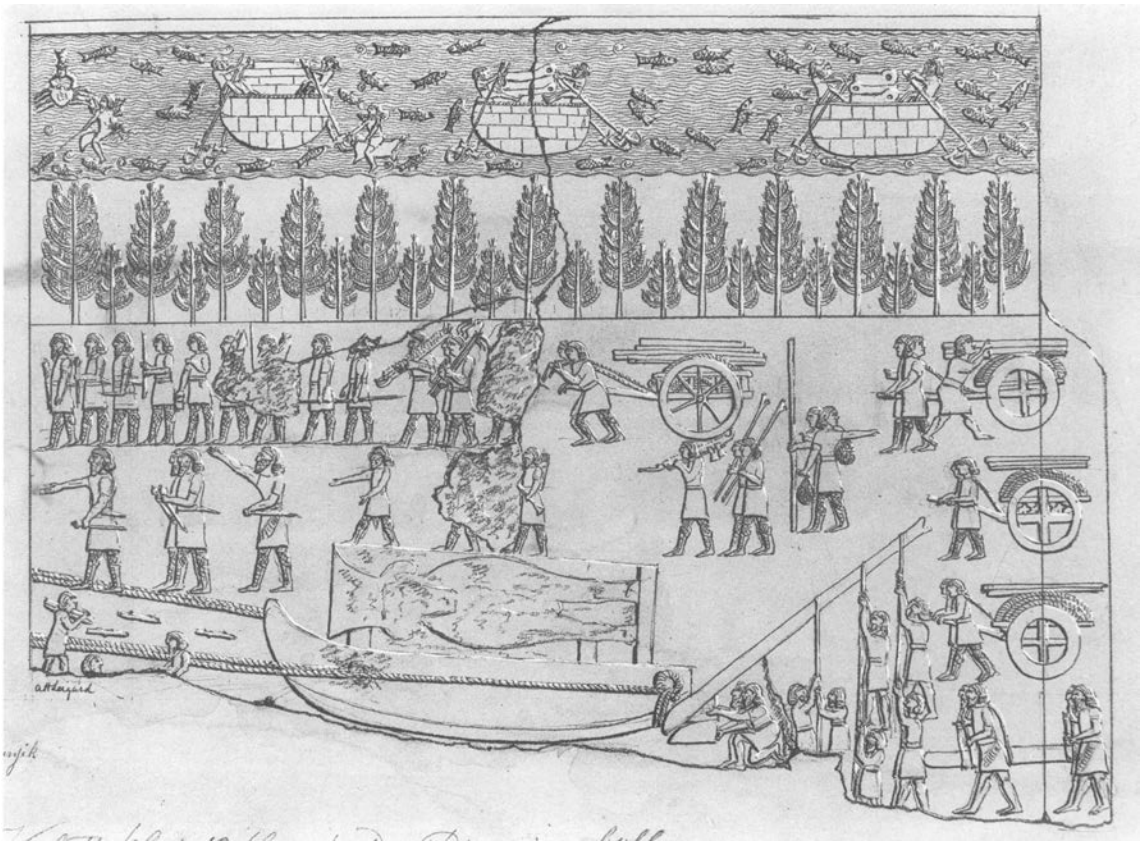

Figure 39: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 53. After Barnett et al., 1998.

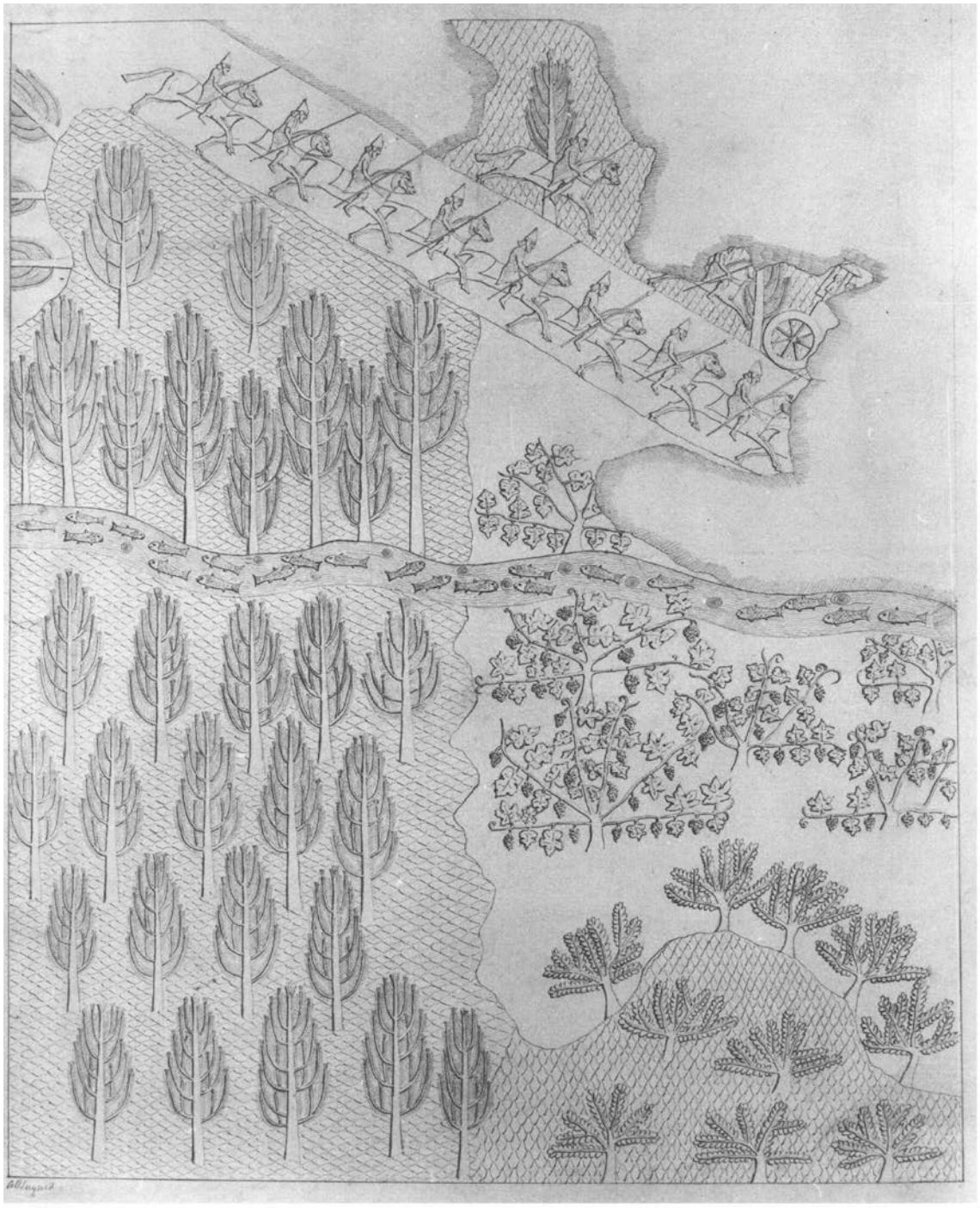

Figure 40: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 1. After Barnett et al., 1998.

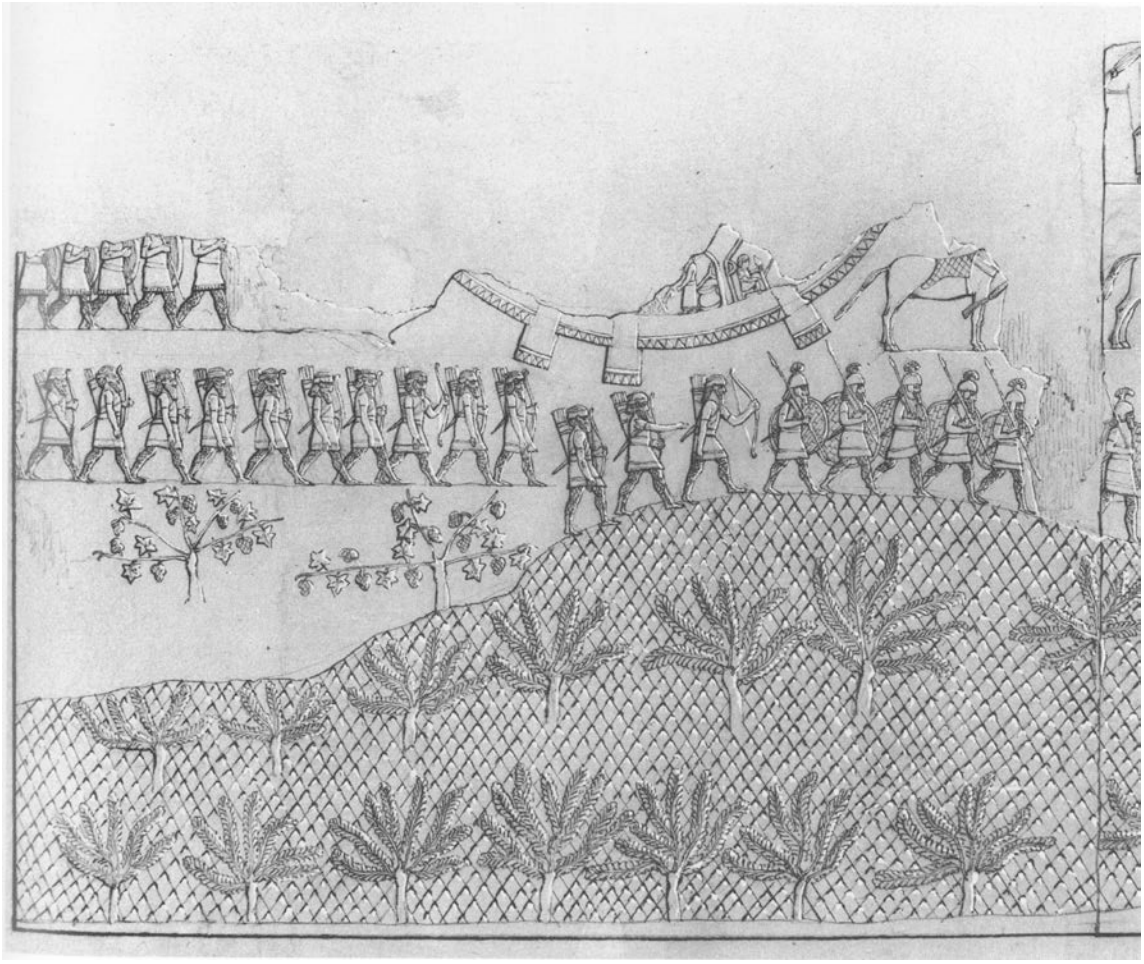

Figure 41: The Palace Without Rival, Court VI, slab 9. After Barnett et al., 1998.

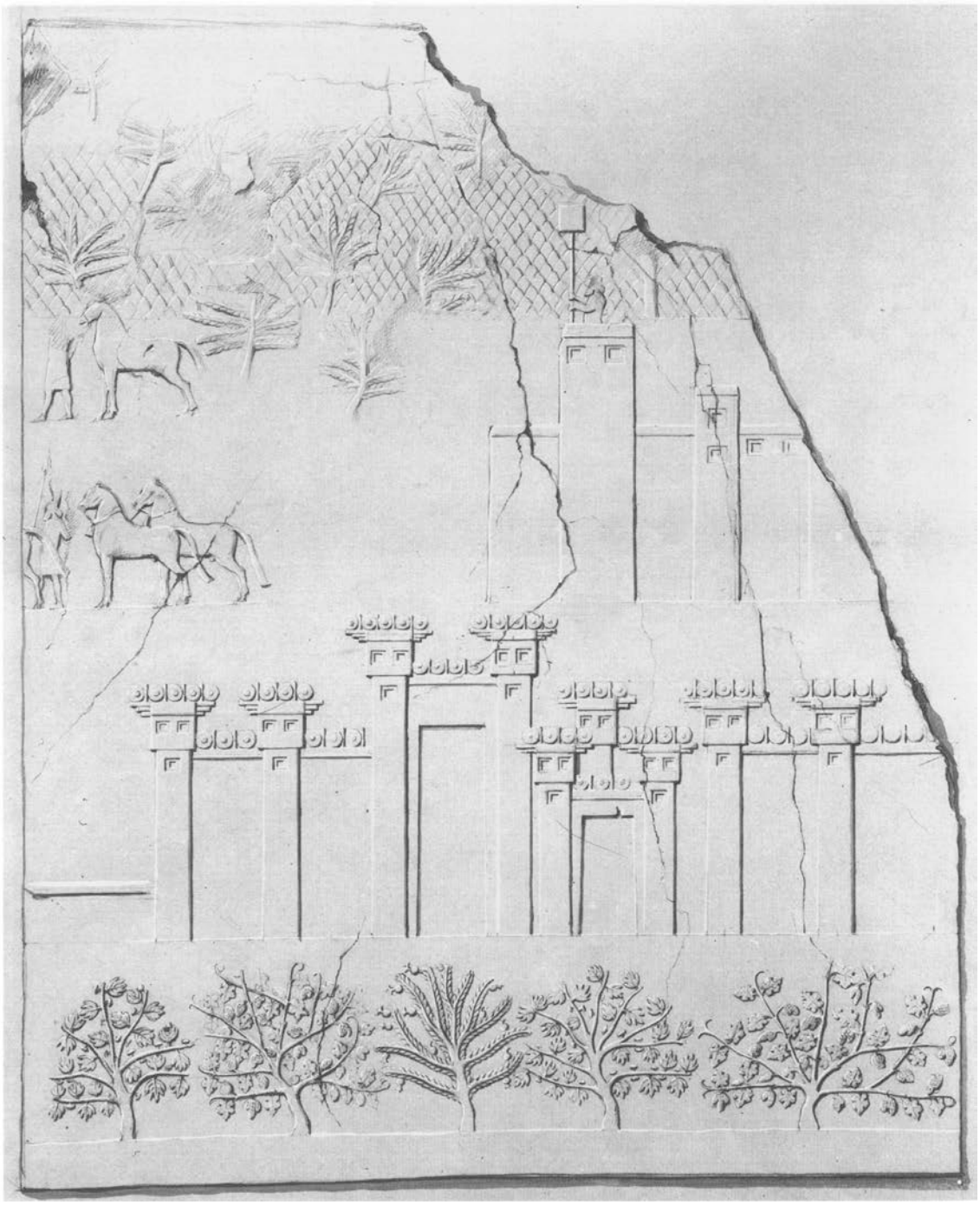

Figure 42: The Palace Without Rival, Throneroom I, slab 23. After Barnett et al., 1998.

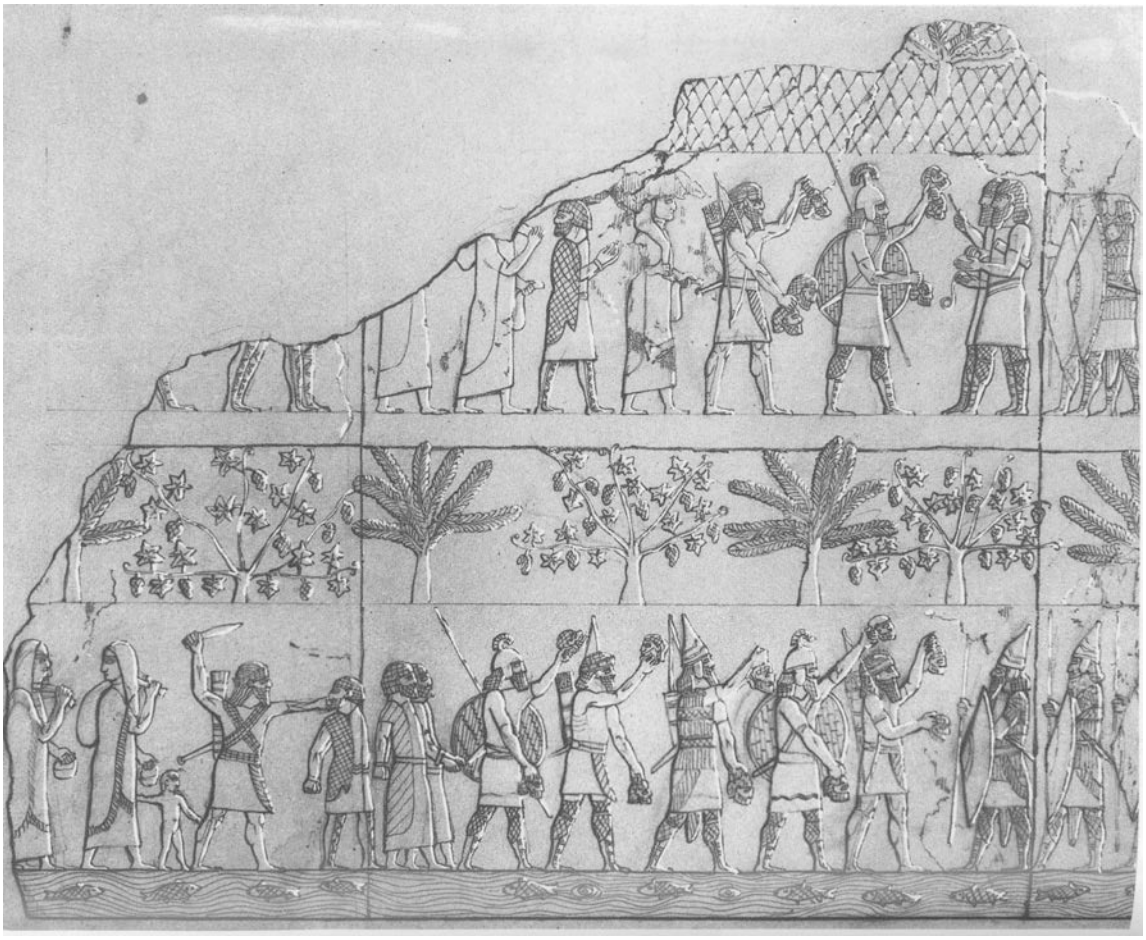

Figure 43: The Palace Without Rival, Room XIV, slabs 13-14. After Barnett et al., 1998.

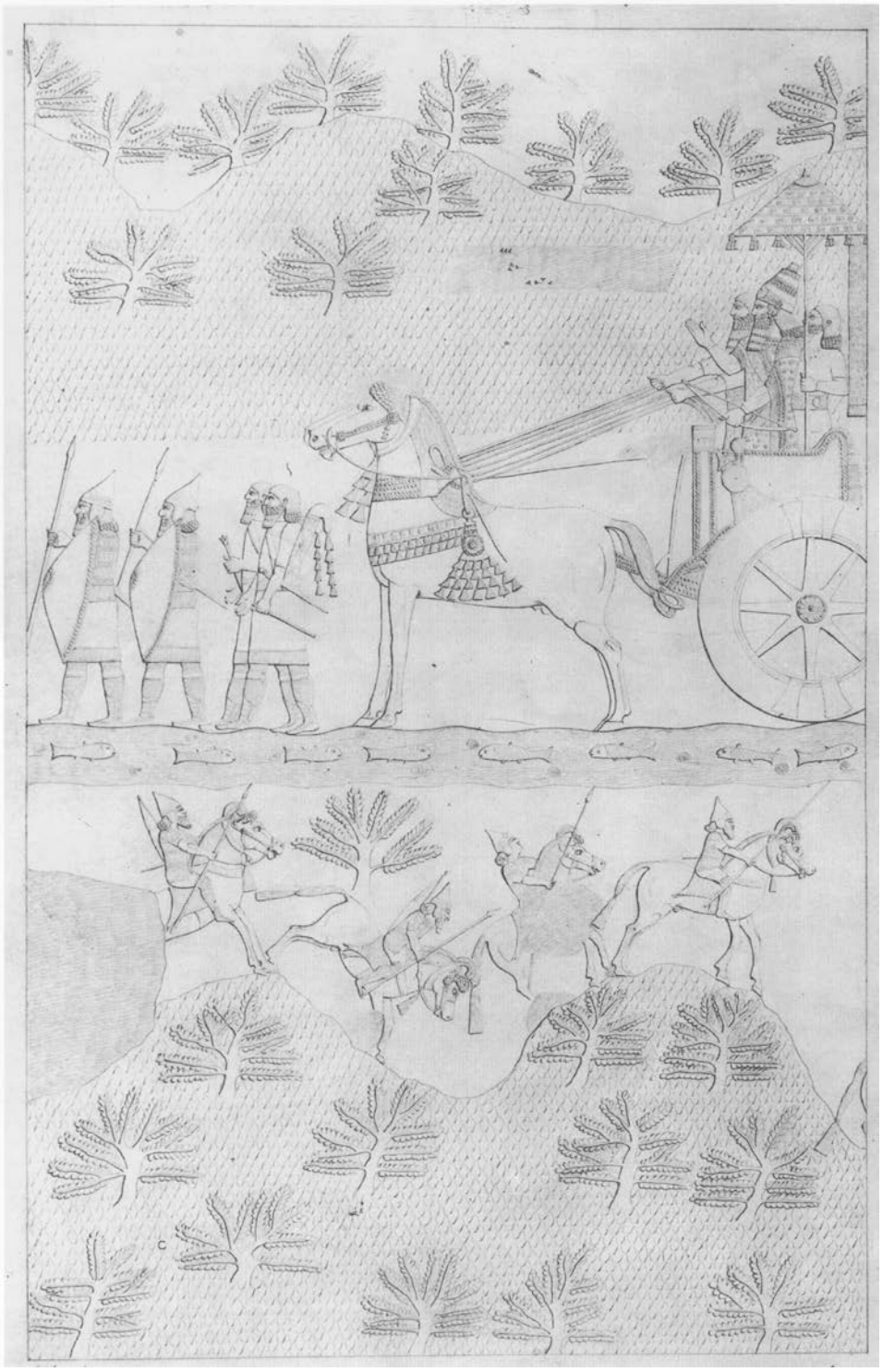

Figure 44: The Palace Without Rival, Room V, slab 30. After Barnett et al., 1998.

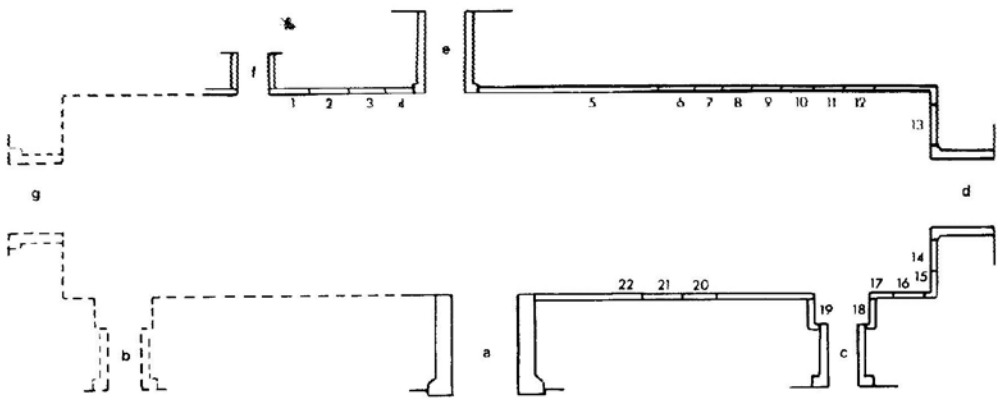

Figure 45: Plan of Throneroom I, from the Palace Without Rival. After Barnett et al., 1998.

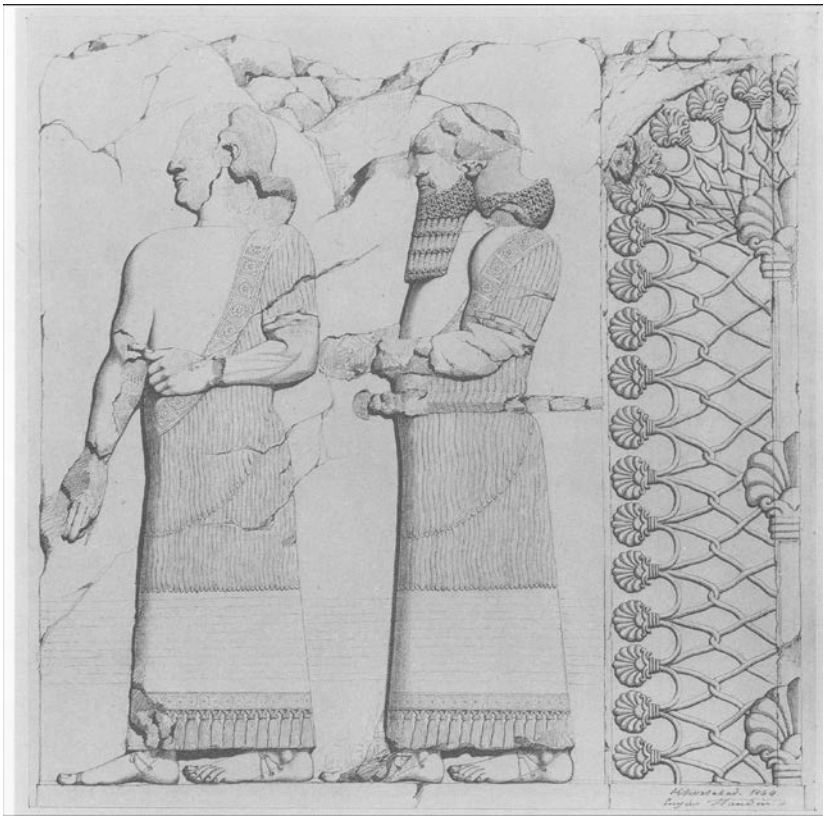

Figure 46: From Sargon II's palace at Dur Šarrukin (Khorsabad). After Albenda, 1986.

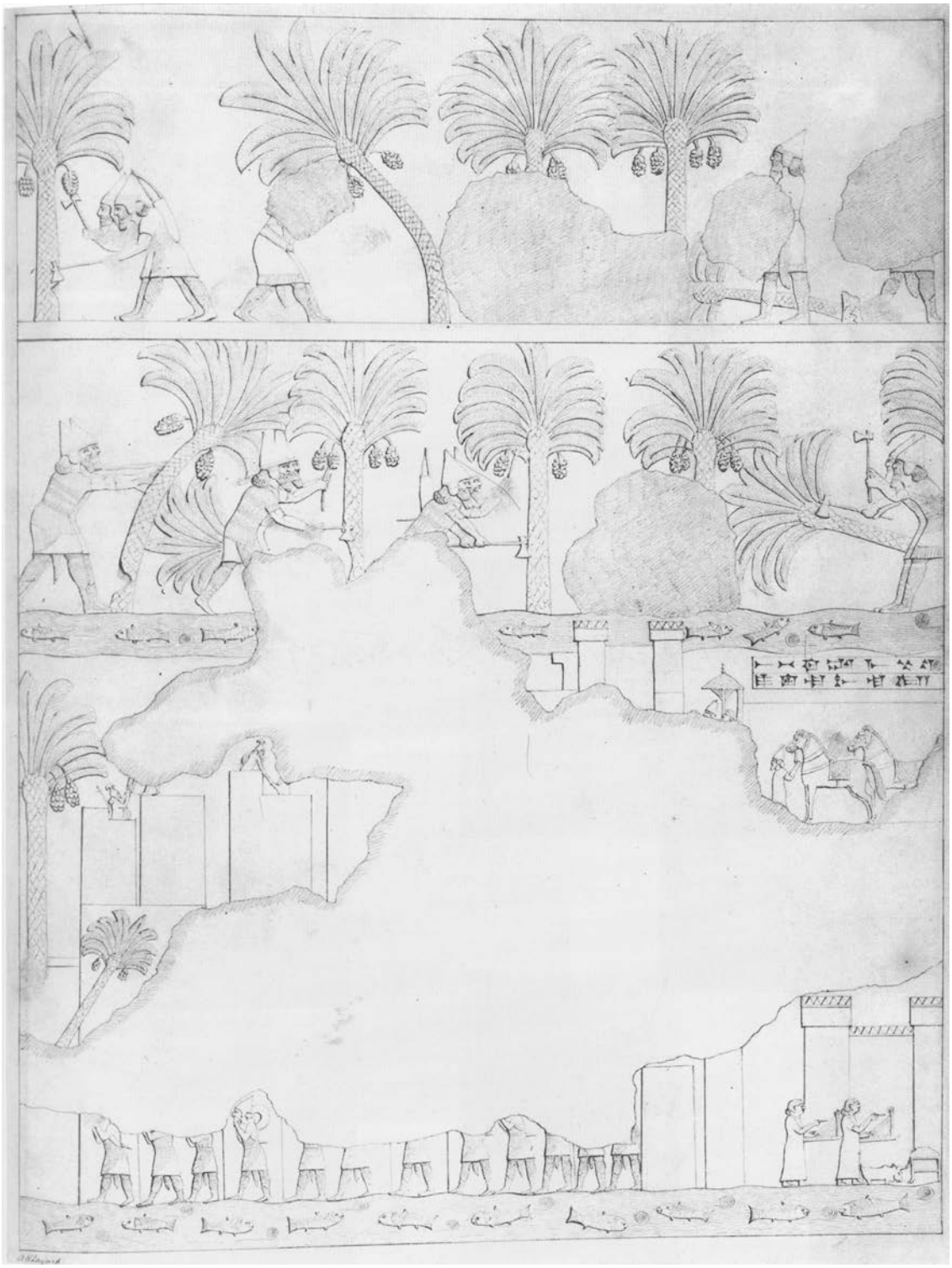

Figure 47: The Palace Without Rival, Room III, slab 8. After Barnett et al., 1998.

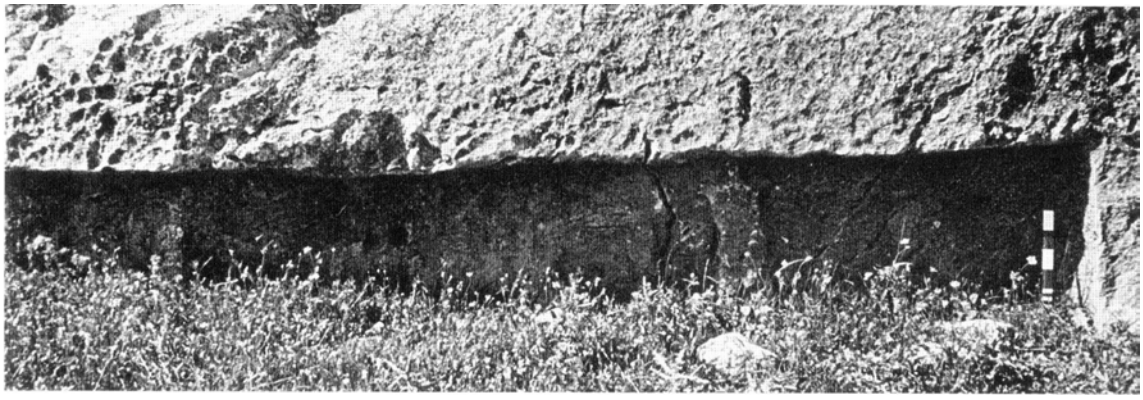

Figure 48: The Faida Relief, with a god's crown just visible right of center. After Bachmman, 1927.

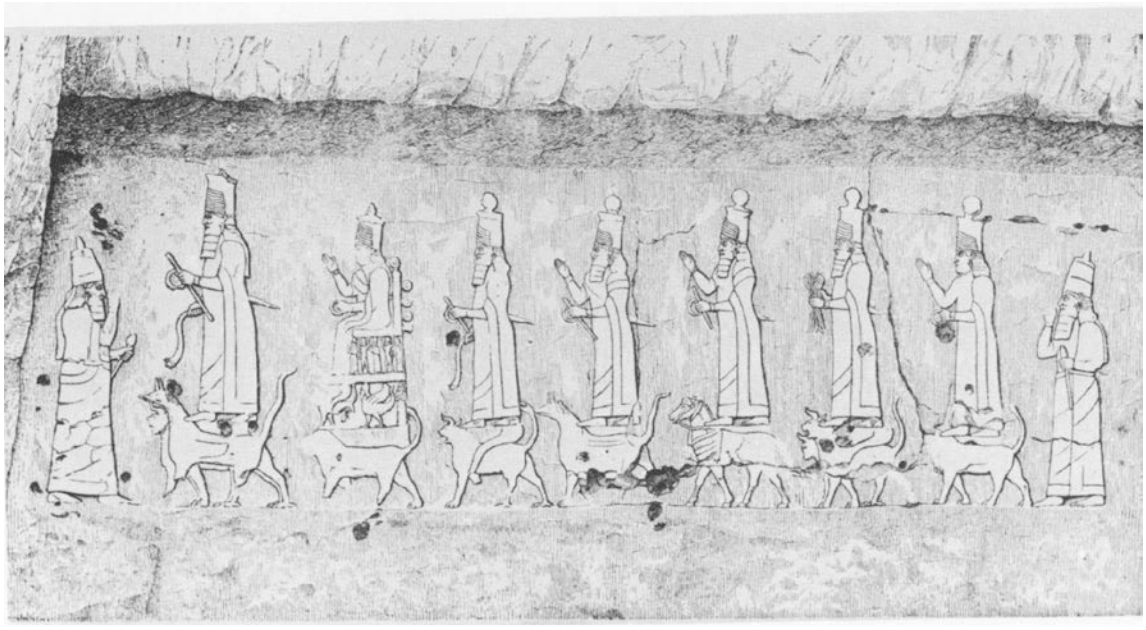

Figure 49: Diagram of the Maltaï Relief. After Bachmman, 1927.

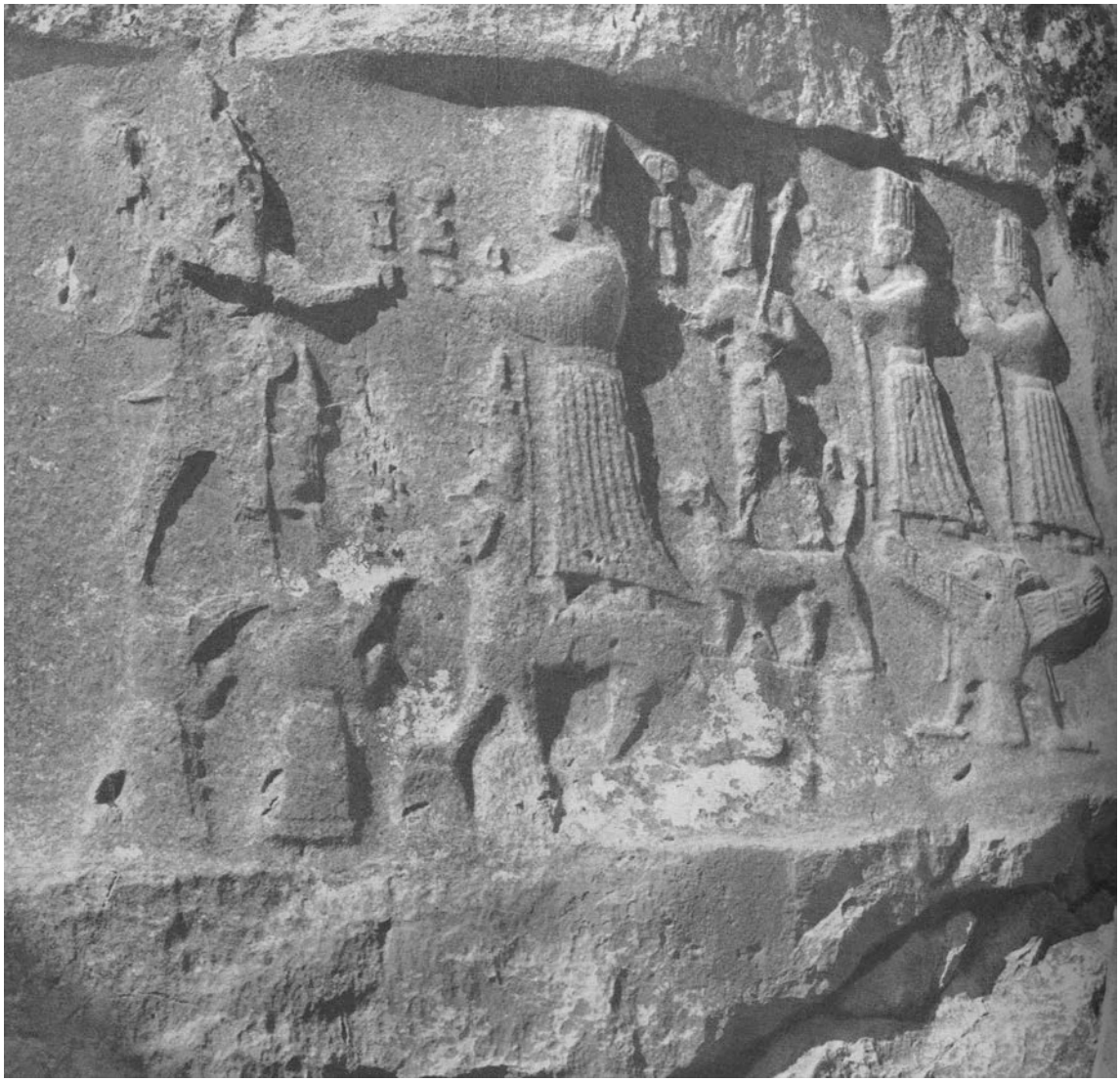

Figure 50: Central deity group of the rock sanctuary of Yazılıkaya, late 13th century BCE. After Alexander, 1986.

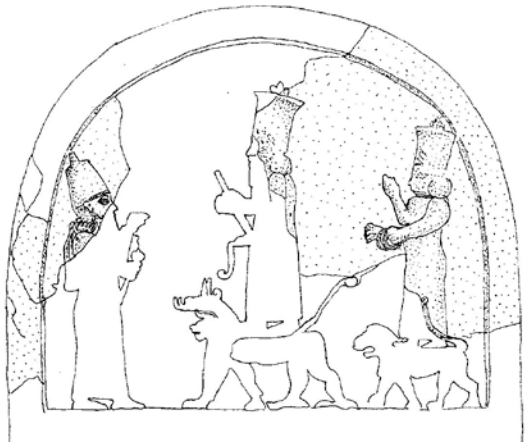

Figure 51: Stele from Assur. After Börker-Klahn, 1982.

Figure 52: Hammurabi's Stele, ca. 1770 BCE. Louvre Museum, Paris. After Strommenger, 1964.

Appendix: The Khinnis Inscription

Luckenbill:

Assur, Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Marduk, Nabû, Nusku, Ishtar, Sibi, the great gods, who in all the lands give attention (lit. raise the eye) to the rule of the black-headed race of men, (who) named me ruler: Sennacherib, the great king, the mighty king, king of the universe, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters (of the world), the prince who endows (their cults): in their enduring grace, from the upper sea to the lower sea, I have marched in safety, and the princes of the four quarters (of the world) I have brought in submission to my feet, so that they drew my yoke.

Jacobsen and Lloyd:

At that time I greatly enlarged the site (lit. abode) of Nineveh, Its walls and the outer wall thereof, which had not existed before, I built anew and raised mountain high. Its fields, which through lack of water had fallen into neglect (lit. ruin) and…, while its people, ignorant of artificial irrigation, turned their eyes heavenward for showers of rain– (these fields) I watered; and from the villages of Masiti, Banbarina, Shapparishu, Kār Shamash-nāsir, Kār Nūri, Rimusa, Hatā, Dalain, Rēsh Ēni, Sulu, Dūr (Ishtar), Shibaniba, Isparirra, Gingilinish, Nampagāte, Tillu, Alumsusi, (and) the waters which were above the town of Hadabiti eighteen canals I dug (and) directed their course into the Khosr river. From the border of the town of Kisiri to the midst of Nineveh I dug a canal; those waters I caused to flow therein. Sennacherib's Channel I called its name.

The bulk of those waters (, however,) I led out from the midst of Mt. Tas, a difficult mountain on the border of Armenia (Urartu). In my land they formerly called that stream […]. Now I, at the command of Assur the great lord, my lord, added unto it (i.e. the canal) the waters of the mountains on its sides from the right and left [and the waters of] Me…, Kukkut, (and) Bīturra, towns in its neighborhood; with stones [I…ed] the canal, (and) Sennacherib's [Channel] I called its name, In addition to the waters from the springs and the waters which I had earlier secured by d[igging] (canals), […] I directed their course to Nineveh, the great metropolis, my royal abode, whose site since [days of old the kings my fathers] had not enlarged and whose adornment they had not undertaken.

At this time I, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, first among all princes, who [marched safely] from the rising sun to the setting sun, [by means of] the waters from the canals which I had caused to be dug […ed] Nineveh together with its neighborhoods; gardens, vineyards, all kinds of […], …products of all the mountains, the fruits of all lands, and […I plan]ted. Up to (where) the waters could not reach I let them out over the thirsty ground, so that its vegetation…[…] of all the orchards; on entering the lands(?) above (the city) and be[low(?)] from the midst of the town of Tarbisu to the "town of the Assyrian" I irrigated annually (so that it was possible) to cultivate grain and sesame.

[Now] in intrusting that which I have planned to the kings my sons, [falsehood]s are not bef[itting]. W[ith] these few […] people I dug that canal. By Assur, my great god, [I swear] that with these people I dug that canal and in a year (and) three months I

finished its construction, (and) [the day its construction(?)] had been completed I finished the digging of it.

To open that canal I sent an *āshipu*-priest and a *kalū*-priest, and…Carnelian, lapis lazuli, *mushgarru*, *hulalū*, (and) UD.ASH-stones, precious stones, a BAL.GI-fish and a SUHUR-fish, the likeness of […] of gold, herbs, (and) choice oils to Ea, lord of the springs, fountains, and meadows, (to) Enbilulu, lord of rivers, (and to) Eneimbal I presented as gifts. I prayed to the great gods, and they heard my prayers and prospered the work of my hands. The sluice gate like(?) a […] or a flail was forced open inward(?) and let in the waters of abundance. By the work of the engineer its (sluice) gate had not been opened when the gods caused the waters to dig [a hole] therein.

After I had inspected the canal and had put it in order, to the great gods who go at my side and who uphold my reign sleek oxen and fat sheep I offered as pure sacrifices. Those men who had dug that canal I clothed with linen (and) brightly colored (woolen) garments. Golden rings, daggers of gold, I put upon them.

Luckenbill:

In the same year with the opening (lit. flowing) of that canal which I dug, against Ummanmenanu, king of Elam and the king of Babylon together with many kings of mountain and sea, who were their allies, in the plain of the city of Halulê I drew up the battle line. At the command of Assur, the great lord, my lord, like a swift javelin I went into their midst and accomplished the defeat of their armies. Their hosts I shattered, I broke up their organization. The chieftains of the king of Elam, together with Nabû-shum-ishkun, son of Merodach-baladan, king of Babylonia, my hands took alive in that battle. As for the king of Elam and the king of Babylonia, the dread of my terrible onslaught overcame them, they forsook their chariots, and they fled their lands to save their lives.

And they did not come back. Thereupon Sennacherib became violently angry and as he ordered (his army) to turn toward Elam, fear and terror were poured out over all of Elam, and they left their land and, to save their lives, like the eagle betook themselves to the inaccessible mountain(s), and, like unto birds that one pursues, their hearts were rent. To the day of their death they did not come out (lit. open any way) nor did they make war.

In my second campaign I advanced swiftly against Babylonia, upon whose conquest I had determined, like the oncoming of a storm I broke loose, and I overwhelmed it like a hurricane. I completely invested that city, with mines and engines my hands (took the city), the plunder…his powerful…whether small or great, I left none. With their corpses I filled the city squares (wide places). Shuzubu, king of Babylonia, together with his family and his (nobles) I carried off alive into my land. The wealth of that city, –silver, gold, precious stones, property and goods, I doled out (counted into the hands of) to my people and they made it their own.

The gods dwelling therein, –the hands of my people took them, and they smashed them. Their property and goods they seized. Adad and Shala, the gods of Ekallâte (a city), whom Marduk-nâdin-ahê, king of Babylon, in the reign of Tiglath-pileser, king of

Assyria, had seized and carried off to Babylon, after four hundred and eighteen years I brought them out of Babylon and returned them to their place in Ekallâte. The city and (its) houses, –foundation and walls (lit. from its foundation to its walls), I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. The wall and outer wall, temples and gods, temple-tower of brick and earth, as many as there were, I razed and dumped them into the Arahtu-canal. Through the midst of that city I dug canals, I flooded its site (lit. ground) with water, and the very foundations thereof (lit. the structure of its foundations) I destroyed. I made its destruction more complete than that by a flood. That in days to come, the site of that city, and (its) temples and gods, might not be remembered, I completely blotted it out with (floods) of water and made it like a meadow.

Jacobsen and Lloyd:

At the mouth of the canal which I had dug through the midst of Mt. Tas I fashioned six great steles with the images of the great gods my lords upon them, and my royal image in the attitude of salutation I set up before them. Every deed of my hands which I had wrought for the good of Nineveh I had engraved thereon. To the kings my sons I left it for the future.

Luckenbill:

If ever there is a future prince among the kings, my sons, who destroys the work which I have done (and) breaks the covenant I have (hereby) made with him, diverts the course of the waters of those canals from the plain of Nineveh, may the great gods, all whose names are named in these stelas, by the words of their mouth, a holy decree which cannot fail, curse him with an evil curse, and overthrow his rule.

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